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## The pipe organ in twentieth-century Great Britain, with specific focus on the development and effects of the neo-classical organ

### Abstract

From as early as the 1920s the romantic English organ became the target of much criticism, specifically amongst Europeans. Albert Schweitzer, for example, had questioned the organ's suitability for the performance of Bach's organ works, deploring its heaviness and crudity, and concluding that no organ in Britain, France, or Germany was suitable for Bach's organ works. Schweitzer's early writings, alongside the 1926 Freiberg Organ Conference resulted in the European organ reform movement, which in the successive years drifted across to Britain.

The organ reform movement aimed at a return to historic practices in organ building. The technological advances made in the nineteenth century were rejected, and specific focus was placed upon mechanical key action and chorus structure. Initially, the British were highly defensive towards the nineteenth-century romantic organ. But in the 1950s, Ralph Downes became an important spokesperson for reform towards the British organ, and eventually his views became manifest in the design for the organ at The Royal Festival Hall, London. Many new and small neo-classical instruments were built to varying degrees of success as a result, following some, if not all, of the tenets of the organ reform movement.

In Britain today, views are still mixed about the neo-classical organ. The rediscovery of mechanical key action has constituted an improvement in the general standard of organ playing. However, organists providing weekly music in our churches have found the neo-classical organ to be a brash, harsh, and unpleasant instrument, and are only favoured by a small number of organists.

This thesis examines the context which informed these attitudes, by looking closely at an array of published sources, including journal articles from the 1950s, principle secondary sources in the field, and a questionnaire which has been sent out across Britain to institutions containing neo-classical instruments to ascertain their success (or otherwise).

The pipe organ in twentieth-century Great Britain  
With specific focus on the development and effects of the neo-classical organ

One Volume

MATTHEW STUART ATHERTON

Degree for  
**Master of Arts**

*University of Durham; Department of Music*

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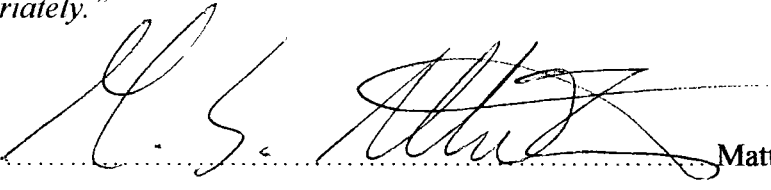


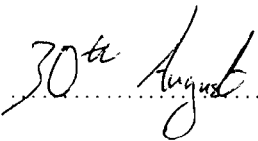
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Signed  Matthew Stuart Atherton

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## Preface

### *Introductory technical information*

The simplest, and most basic, definition of an organ can be summed up as a collection of metal and wooden tubes of varying size, shape, and pitch that produce tones when supplied with wind under pressure. Sir Christopher Wren is known to have described the organ as a ‘Kist of whistles’ and although his comment is not particularly praiseworthy towards the instrument, he is nonetheless basically correct. (Baker, D., *The Organ*. Princes Risborough, 1991, 5)

Over the centuries, the organ has evolved into an expressive musical instrument and a complex piece of technology. Today, there are several varieties of organs in existence. These include the portable Regals and Positive Organs of medieval times, containing between twenty to forty pipes; the gigantic instruments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, containing many thousands of pipes; and now, in the twenty-first century, the digital organ, which contains no pipes.

The variety of music played on the organ has changed much from the solo and accompanimental repertoire of the classical genre played in sacred and secular conditions, through to the more popularist genre of the twentieth century with the mighty Wurlitzer accompanying classical dancing and the Hammond electronic accompanying bands in night clubs and bars. However, the organ is more commonly associated with ‘The Church’ and can be described (praiseworthy or not) with phrases such as ‘The King of Instruments’, ‘The Beast in the Loft’ and ‘That Heap of Junk in the Corner’.

Most organs have a collection of organs within them known as ‘divisions’. These divisions are operated by keyboards (or manuals) for the hands, and pedals for the feet. Each division has a set number of keys to play the pipes, and this is known as the ‘key



compass'. The varying groups of pipes are called 'ranks' and are categorised into two main groups; 'Flues' and 'Reeds'. Flue ranks are made up of flutes, principals (diapasons), and strings. Each rank of pipes is determined by pitch and these pitches can range from 64ft' to anything above 1ft'.

Ranks of pipes are activated by pulling a circular disc (a stop), located on the console at either side of the manuals, or by pressing a tab-key located above the top manual. This activates a device called a 'slider' (some instruments do not have sliders. See chapters one and five) which resides inside the windchest (the box where the pipes stand) and moves from left to right or vice versa to enable wind to be emitted into the chosen rank of pipes. To deactivate a stop, the process must be reversed.

To make the pipes speak one must depress a manual or pedal key, in which a signal, either produced mechanically, pneumatically, or electrically, opens a 'pallet' inside the windchest (located under the slider), and this discharges wind into the chosen note, on the chosen rank of pipes.

### *Background methodology*

The overall history of the organ is now well document and much of it a product of twentieth-century commentators and enthusiasts. Authors such as Stephen Bicknell, Nicholas Thistlethwaite, Peter Williams, John Rowntree and John Brennan (to name a few) have written extensively on the subject and their work is of great importance, thus providing much of the secondary sources used in this thesis. These resources have been augmented by extensive journal literature, with articles coming from *The Musical Times*, *The Organ*, and *Organists Review*, to name but a few.

My research has also involved questionnaires because one of the aims of this thesis was to ascertain direct information about the success (or otherwise) of the neo-classical organs installed in Britain throughout the twentieth century. I have achieved

this by preparing a questionnaire which has been sent to institutions listed in the three volumes published by Rowntree and Brennan entitled 'The Classical Organ in Britain 1955 - 1990' cataloguing such installations (see chapter six).

I have made visits to play and assess neo-classical, romantic, and digital instruments, including the important instruments of the neo-classical period, namely The Queen's College, Oxford; New College Oxford; The London Oratory; and Hexham Abbey. Sadly, due to restrictions I have not yet been able to visit and play The Royal Festival Hall organ. I have also played on some of this countries finest romantic styled instruments, namely Durham Cathedral, York Minster, Newcastle Cathedral and as a detour the three manual Wurlitzer in The New Victoria Centre, Howden-le-Wear, County Durham. I have also performed on the four manual Makin Organ in Salford Roman Catholic Cathedral, and have become acquainted with organs by Copeman-Hart in Sunderland, Newcastle, and Henshaw. From playing the above instruments, I have been able to draw my own conclusions about them and compare and contrast them to the views expressed in the published writings of other musicians.

I have worked closely with Mr. Ian Nicholson, proprietor of The Vincent Organ Company Ltd., Sunderland. Ian has been a great support and friend, and has allowed me to accompany him on numerous occasions to help with tunings and maintenance of organs. None of the organs in his care are neo-classical instruments, however, but through this experience I have gained first hand experience into the organ's mechanics, and witnessed the process involved with tuning instruments. I have also been introduced to the extension or unit organ, of which Ian's firm have much knowledge, and it has been fascinating to witness their construction.

## Chapter One

### The British Organ from 1820 to 1930, a brief history

According to Lionel Rogg, because the organ resides primarily in churches and is used for such purposes, many of the doctrines proclaimed true about organ building and playing are in constant conflict. Many instruments, more often than not, are a combination of different schools of organ building and can illustrate insecurities on instrumental level. This is because organs represent compromises on behalf of the players, builders, and scholars who are working with their own predispositions. In return, because of forceful opinions being too divergent, confusion is borne out of what may be right or wrong.<sup>1</sup>

The vast majority of musical instruments over time, except possibly the organ, have evolved into something of a static form as John Norman informs:

Today's concert grand piano is the same in all essentials as one made eighty years ago. The design of the Violin has hardly changed since Antonio Stradivari. Yet the organ, much older than either of these, continues to change, like the Vicar of Bray, to reflect the priorities of the day.<sup>2</sup>

The many tonal changes the organ has undergone over the last 400 years, according to Thurston Dart, has been more completely transformed than the sound of any other musical instrument,<sup>3</sup> and Geraint Jones's article 'Is the Organ a Musical Instrument' written for *The Musical Times* in 1952, states that 'no other instrument is perhaps as great a source of controversy as the organ.'<sup>4</sup> Cogwell illustrates the main direction the organ took in the mid twentieth century:

After all, other musical instruments, such as the harpsichord, piano, violin, etc, etc. have undergone very little change over the centuries with only subtle improvement in power, efficiency and harmonic development, while organs seem to have gone in the other direction with later designs having less power, less efficiency, and less harmonic development. (Organs

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1 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach'. *The Musical Times*, (Mar 1970), 310-3.

2 Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. North Pomfret, Vermont, USA, David and Charles Inc., 1984, 65.

3 Dart, T., *The Interpretation of Music*. London, Hutchinson & Company (Publishers) Ltd., 1954/1967, 40.

4 Jones, G., 'Is the Organ a Musical Instrument?'. *The Musical Times*, (Dec 1952), 543-4.



now have scores of stops, high horsepower blowers, huge power supplies, but only “mellow” sounds – even in small churches.)<sup>5</sup>

To put this into perspective, one needs to return to the English organ of the 1800s. The instrument built by William Hill in 1834 for Birmingham Town Hall was the first of many instruments that sought to bring music to the masses by performances of great orchestral works, transcribed for the organ. In secular surroundings during the 1800s, orchestral and chamber concerts were rare,<sup>6</sup> and the organ found a niche in the performance of orchestral music, arranged for the organ, by the organist, to entertain the public. When Howard Goodall spoke to Henry Willis IV in his documentary for Channel Four Television in 1996, Henry Willis described the organ concert scene of Victorian England as music ‘for the educated snobs in the afternoon and the hoi-polloi in the evening.’<sup>7</sup> It was during this period of Victorian England that saw rise to the virtuoso concert organist who gained his own reputation as a recitalist away from a cathedral console.

From the 1820s, the English organ grew considerably (from an instrument of up to twenty stops and no pedals, to a large and overwhelming instrument, up to five manuals, pedals, and over one-hundred stops). The organ became a giant orchestral monster and the prospect for many was very exciting.

It is acceptable to say that the British organ had always been many paces behind the European instrument. With the advent of faster travel by road, rail, and boat in the nineteenth century, it enabled the British organ builders and players to visit Europe to study the organs of Holland and Germany, and in time to visit the large and remarkable instruments of E. F. Walcker in Ludwigsburg and Cavaillé-Coll in Paris.<sup>8</sup> From such

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5 Cogwell, D. W., ‘Where is the Art in Organ Building’. *The Organ*, (Jul 1979), 41.

6 Downes, R., *Baroque Tricks. Adventures with the Organ Builders*. Oxford, Positif Press, 1983/1999, 13.

7 Henry Willis IV speaking in interview with Howard Goodall in his documentary from Channel Four Television 1996, entitled *Howard Goodall’s Organ Works*. Episode 3 of 4.

8 Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990/1993, 178.

visits it became apparent that the foreigners had much to offer the English in respect of organ design.

Up until the 1840s, the experimentations in the previous two to three decades with manual compasses and the inclusion of pedals had left the English organ without a clear focus. This was because the English organ had long manual compasses, which extended down to FF or GG in the bass, producing the pitches the pedals were soon to do, or did in Europe. Pedals were rarely found in Britain until the 1830s and even then it took at least another ten or so years for them to be fully accepted by organists.<sup>9</sup> When pedals did begin to appear in Britain they rarely contained their own set of pipes and were permanently coupled to the manuals. To give the pedals their own role, the English reluctantly adopted the German key system, where the manuals start at CC in the bass and the pedals start at CCC in the bass (i.e. an octave lower than the manual).<sup>10</sup> Hence the pedals gained their own ranks of pipes (flues and reeds) starting at 32ft, on very large instruments such as York Minster and Birmingham Town Hall, and continuing at 16ft, 8ft, and 4ft pitch on smaller instruments. Though rarely did any instrument contain pedal mixture-work (except in the very large instruments). Between 1821 and 1837, Bristol organist, Edward Hodges, promoted widely the C compass organ with a desire to achieve a consistency between British and Continental instruments.<sup>11</sup> In 1837, Mendelssohn visited Birmingham Town Hall and publicly performed organ music by J. S. Bach.<sup>12</sup> Mendelssohn's performances of Bach had great influence on the English organists, which led them to favour the German key system.<sup>13</sup> Mendelssohn did little to influence English organ design directly, he did however request broader pedal keys at

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9 Ibid., 181 & 183.

10 Ibid., 150-7 & 181-5.

11 Ibid., 150-9.

12 Ibid., 174.

13 Ibid., 164 & 181.

Birmingham and complained about the lack of chorus structure on the choir organ.<sup>14</sup> It was the collaboration between Henry J. Gauntlett (an English lawyer, organist, and close friend of Mendelssohn) and William Hill that led the way in organ design, building organs with C compasses. These instruments had a good balance between the great and swell divisions, and contained an independent pedal division based on a 16 foot open diapason of wood.<sup>15</sup> According to Thistlethwaite, instruments of the 1840s with the German system met the demands for those wanting to play Bach, but did little to satisfy the rising generation who wanted more expression, more flexibility, and the ability to imitate the orchestra:

In an age fascinated by acoustics, mechanics and engineering it offered more scope than any other single instrument for experiment and investigation. At the same time, the musicians were pressing for improvements. They wished the organ to become more expressive, less inflexible, better able to imitate other instruments. The organ-builder found himself surrounded with powerful inducements to make innovations, both tonal and mechanical.<sup>16</sup>

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the refinement of woodwind and brass instruments and the complex orchestrations which composers and arrangers were experimenting with began to rub-off on the organist and organ builder. In the search for more colour and variety in organ performances, organists such as Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1870), Henry Smart (1813-79), and William Thomas Best (1826-97) did much to promote such. Wesley would dazzle his audiences with masterful improvisations in contrapuntal styles, which secured him fame as a performer, rather than with his own compositions or arrangements. Chappell illustrates this in his book 'Dr. S. S. Wesley – Portrait of a Victorian Musician' when he prints a letter written by Gauntlett to the Dean of Exeter Cathedral in 1835 commending Wesley saying:

As an Organ Performer, although there may be one who possibly exceeds him in brilliance, clearness, and rapidity of execution, yet in the sublimity of intricacies of fugue writing, I know of none who excel him. In his extemporary performances, he displays great concentration of mind, and a ready flow of imagination is exemplified in his varied melodies and profound modulations. His performance on the Pedals is truly extraordinary, and he exhibits perfect command over all the mere mechanical difficulties connected with a just use of the King of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>15</sup> An example is the organ in Brinkburn Priory, Northumberland, built by William Hill in 1867.

<sup>16</sup> Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ*. 340.

Instruments. I have heard most of the celebrated continental organists, and am well acquainted with those of this country, and I have no hesitation in saying that I consider him in some respects superior to them all.<sup>17</sup>

However, it was Smart who made an important contribution to modern British organ music, when at the time, according to Thistlethwaite, most music played was 'a diet of vocal and orchestral arrangements.'<sup>18</sup> Smart's music, like that of Wesley's, was born out of improvisation,<sup>19</sup> and Smart was keen to exploit the modern organ with its registrational aids and new key actions. The provision of combination pedals or pistons is to be presumed in Smart's Postlude in D, where the middle section requires a contrast in dynamics to that of the first section, which is then proceeded by a general crescendo to the recapitulation. Also interestingly is the geography of the hands, as the piece utilises three manuals. This is evident from bars 1-23, which requires manual changes every four bars between the great and swell to create an echo effect. From bars 84-110 both hands play on the choir organ, and from bars 111-119 the left hand moves to the great and the right hand moves to the swell. Both hands subsequently return to the great and the process repeats until the close. The pedalling is also a point of interest. As pedalling was beginning to find acceptance, it is interesting to witness the complexity of Smart's writing in this specific piece. Not only must Smart have had a considerable pedal technique, but also a firm knowledge of pedal writing as he makes use of the whole pedal compass. This may seem obvious today, but during the period Smart was writing, complex pedalling would still be something of a novel idea to the English. 'Smart's brisk *Postludes* and tender *andantes* were to set a fashion in composition for the organ which would find favour until the 1950s and is still not altogether extinguished.'<sup>20</sup>

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17 Chappell, P., *Dr. S. S. Wesley. Portrait of a Victorian Musician*. Essex, Great Wakering Essex, Mayhew-Crimond Ltd., 1977, 34.

18 *Ibid.*, 344.

19 McCrea, A., 'British Organ Music after 1800'. in Thistlethwaite, N., and Webber, G., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 286.

20 Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ*. 344.

According to Thistlethwaite, Smart was very keen on the orchestral sound of the organ, and had the Birmingham Music Hall organ installed into St. Pancras' Church with minimal alteration; thus suggesting that the mechanical and orchestral novelties of the secular instrument were to be of benefit for the church.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, it was W. T. Best who took the orchestral organ to the next stage. Best held church posts, but it was as a concert organist he was most reputed for

S. S. Wesley might have been praised for his pedalling but Best was a thoroughbred of a new generation, a generation with technique learnt at the cutting edge of choral accompaniment, arranging, and concert hall entertaining.<sup>22</sup>

Best's mastery of orchestral arrangements and execution, caused some to question the suitability of such arrangements, and Sir Walter Parratt (1841-1924) described Best's arrangements as 'examples of misapplied skill.'<sup>23</sup> Because of the preoccupation with such arrangements, it caused a less than enthusiastic reception to new works that were composed specifically for the organ.

As the popularity of the organ was gaining, albeit due to the arrangements played, rather than to the new music composed specifically for it, instruments became larger. The ability to play these larger instruments became much more difficult because of the limitations with mechanical key action. The increased popularity in solo registers meant that more wind was required to cope with the larger number of pipes per instruments, and with such pipes requiring larger wind-pressures to produce more noise, up to 30 inches in some extreme cases, the wind chests pallets could not be opened at ease by direct mechanical linkage at the speed required by a performer. A way had to be found to lighten the key touch. The advent of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, with its enthusiasm to push technological boundaries, created much scope for possibilities in organ design. Attention was duly directed towards the employment of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> McCrea, A., 'British Organ Music after 1800'. 289.

<sup>23</sup> Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ*. 345.



pneumatics to assist and overcome the problem of heavy key touch. As early as 1827, Joseph Booth of Wakefield built an organ for the church at Arncliffe near Sheffield employing pneumatic assistance to the bass notes,<sup>24</sup> and David Hamilton is reported to have added pneumatic assistance to the organ at St. John's Episcopal Church, Edinburgh in 1835.<sup>25</sup> According to Thistlethwaite, the history of early pneumatic assistance is obscure and poorly documented and the work of Charles Spackman Barker generally takes the credit for developing pneumatic assistance.<sup>26</sup> It is reported that Barker had developed a pneumatic lever in 1832 and had presented it to Camidge at York Minster in 1833 with the aim to assist with the bass notes on the organ. However, nothing came of this, despite interest from Camidge, and Barker subsequently offered the lever to Hill to assist with the Birmingham Town Hall organ. Again the pneumatic lever was rejected, which is surprising, considering the organ was a large four manual with mechanical action. It was the French organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll who adopted Barker's pneumatic lever. Cavaillé-Coll successfully employed Barker's lever into his new organ for the Abbey of St Denis in 1841, winning Barker instant acclaim. The success of Barker's lever at St. Denis soon spread back to England creating many possibilities of using pneumatics in organ design. Henry Willis (1821-1901), a fine engineer and musician, improved Barker's lever by creating tubular-pneumatic action in the 1850s. Willis removed any mechanical linkage between key and pallet and replaced such with small trunks to convey compressed air to levers directly between the chests.<sup>27</sup> By using tubular-pneumatic action it enabled instruments to be divided. By way of example, in cathedrals, divisions could be placed either side of the Quire with great, choir, and pedal divisions on one side, and swell, solo, and more pedal on the other. Willis applied this practice to his new cathedral organs at St. Paul's, London (1872),

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24 Ibid., 351-2.

25 Ibid., 352.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 357.

Durham (1876/7), and Salisbury (1877). Hereafter other builders followed suit. This was important for ecclesiological reasons, particularly in cathedrals as the chancel screen was no longer the favoured site for the organ as Thistlethwaite notes:

By freeing the builder to arrange chests, console and mechanism in hitherto unconventional ways, this form of action was of the greatest use to a builder such as the Englishman Henry Willis (1821-1901), confronted with an organist's demand for a large organ and the architect's refusal to accommodate it. By pioneering the division of a cathedral organ on either side of the choir at St. Paul's London, Willis at once overcame a difficulty and created an opportunity for abuse which other builders and players were quick to exploit.<sup>28</sup>

Tubular-pneumatic action enabled a lightened key touch, allowing larger instruments to be played with ease, satisfying the demands for more orchestral registers on high wind pressures. However, the promptness and precision of such an action could be slow because of the time delay between the distances the wind had to travel from the console to each individual note. This was to become strong ammunition in the next century for proving the advantages of mechanical key action (and low wind pressures), but for the time being though, the triumph of tubular pneumatic action and the political importance of the divided organ were immense.<sup>29</sup>

The application of electricity to organ building was the next logical progression and had been under practical consideration for sometime.<sup>30</sup> It is known that as early as the 1840s, Wilkinson, an English builder, had recognised the potential of using electric magnets to open pallets, but it was not until the 1860s, with the collaboration of Péschard and Barker, that a workable electric action was made.<sup>31</sup> It was, however, Englishman Robert Hope-Jones (1859-1914) who is given the main credit for exploiting electrical possibilities in organ design. Hope-Jones was a telephone engineer, but had a keen interest in the organ. In 1887, he rebuilt the organ of St. John's Church Birkenhead (where he was organist) with an electro-pneumatic action of his own design and a

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28 Thistlethwaite, N., 'Origins and Development of the Organ'. in Thistlethwaite, N., and Webber, G., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 14.

29 Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ*. 269.

30 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 287.

31 Ibid and Thistlethwaite, N., 'Origins and Development of the Organ'. 14.

detached electric console, assisted by his parish choir and the organ builder Franklin Lloyd.<sup>32</sup> This instrument attracted much attention and by 1892 Hope-Jones had established his own company manufacturing parts for organs.<sup>33</sup> With his new action, Hope-Jones had managed to replace most of the bulky and expensive machinery, such as lead tubing and stop mechanisms, with hundreds of self cleaning wire contacts and multi-contact electric switches that could easily be mass produced. By using a combined armature or value electro-magnet he was able to employ low voltages and reduce the current consumption of the organ to manageable proportions.<sup>34</sup> Having removed much of the mechanical bulk from the organ, Hope-Jones directed his attention to the console, which he detached from the organ allowing the organist an easier view of the choir and the surroundings. He replaced the traditional draw-stops with stop-keys and placed them above the top manual rather than at either side of the manuals, (which was the conventional practice) and in return, reduced the height of the console considerably. He also established 'double touch',<sup>35</sup> which with skill allows solo lines and accompaniment to be played on the same manual. This works when the keyboard is pressed beyond its normal limits, as it activates a second set of wire contacts, which in turn activate the electro magnets of the desired note. This became very popular with the cinema organ, (but yet again, like pneumatic action, electric action was strong ammunition years later for the classical purists proclaiming the advantages of mechanical key action).

Alongside the major mechanical developments the organ builders were making, they were also experimenting with voicings and pipe scales. It became popular from about 1880 for mixture work to be removed from existing instruments or excluded from new instruments in favour of smoother, wide scaled diapasons, flutes, and orchestral

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32 Sumner, W. L., *The Organ; Its Evolution, Principles of Construction and Use*. London, Macdonald & Co, Ltd., 1952/1953, 229.

33 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 291.

34 Ibid., 293.

35 Ibid.

imitations. Even towards the end of Father Willis's career, he was more sparing in respect of his mixture work. This is evident in his organ built for Lincoln Cathedral (1898), (which was his last cathedral instrument), as Laurence Elvin wrote in 1961 saying that 'Willis designed more ambitious flue choruses than at Lincoln, with mixtures of greater brilliance.'<sup>36</sup> This was the opinion of most organ builders at the time, and Hope-Jones, in particular, believed the organ chorus to be doomed and that it should be replaced by individual voices of great colour and variety, available at every level of power from the almost inaudible to the almost unbearable.<sup>37</sup> Hector Parr describes the period from 1880 to 1950 as 'the age of dignity and dullness.'<sup>38</sup>

Some new, larger, instruments did contain mixture work, though this was seen by builders and players as a low priority over the large thick diapasons and flues. Even reeds lost their bright tone and became smoother and more mellow like the horns and trombas developed by Hope-Jones and Harrison & Harrison. It was the small instruments that suffered the most from the exclusion of upperwork and mixtures. Many instruments built between 1880 and 1914, according to Parr, displayed these characteristics at their worst.<sup>39</sup> However, it would be far to say that this was happening before 1880 and continued well after 1914. Often, small instruments (of the period), containing two manuals and pedals with limited speaking registers would contain nothing above a 4ft' pitch, and such would either be a harmonic flute or gemshorn. A typical specification would be –

Great- Open Diapason 8ft', Dulciana 8ft', Clarabella 8ft', Harmonic Flute 4ft'.

Swell- Violin Diapason 8ft', Rohr Gedact 8ft', Gamba 8ft', Gemshorn 4ft', Oboe 8ft'.

Pedal- Bourdon 16ft', Bass Flute 8ft'.

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<sup>36</sup> Elvin, L., 'The Organ at Lincoln Cathedral'. *The Organ.*, (Jan 1961), 119.

<sup>37</sup> Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ.* 293.

<sup>38</sup> Parr, H. C., *British Organs, Past Present and Future.* [www.c-parr.freemove.co.uk/hcp/organs](http://www.c-parr.freemove.co.uk/hcp/organs) (accessed 16/10/2003), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 4.

In many circumstances individual registers would be of pleasant tone, but in combination the result would be less than ideal, often creating a swamp of sound, unsatisfactory for congregational accompaniments and a vast majority of true organ repertoire. The above hypothetical specification is typical of the period in many small churches and chapels across Great Britain. Builders from the period, such as John Laycock (Langthwaite Methodist Church, Arkengarthdale and Gunnerside Methodist Chapel, Swaledale), Laycock and Bannister (Steeton Wesleyan Chapel and The Baptist Chapel, Glusburn),<sup>40</sup> Denman of York (Thirkleby Village Church, North Yorkshire), J. J. Binns (St. James' Church, Baldersby, North Yorkshire), Nicholson of Worcester (St. David's Church, Barmouth, Gwynedd, North Wales)<sup>41</sup> and Harrison & Harrison (St. Ethelburga, Bishopgate, London)<sup>42</sup> have built instruments with specifications very similar to the above hypothetical one.

Medium sized instruments did not escape unscathed. Although many contained a 4ft' principal along side an open diapason, if a 2ft' register was included, it was often a piccolo flute rather than a fifteenth. In many cases, a manual 16ft' register would be given priority over a mixture or even a 2ft', such as the Abbot & Smith organ in Pickering Parish Church, North Yorkshire and the Peter Conacher organ in St. Mary's Church, Wath, near Ripon, North Yorkshire.<sup>43</sup> Instruments of medium size may contain one mixture on the swell at 12. 15. pitch (no separate 2ft' register) and a fifteenth on the great,<sup>44</sup> or a 2ft' piccolo on the swell with a separate fifteenth and sesquialtera mixture on the great at 12. 17.<sup>45</sup> In more ambitious instruments, a mixture composition of 15. 19. 22. could be included on the great organ with the same composition on the swell. On

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40 For details and specifications of these instruments see: Hughes, B., *John Laycock. Weaver and Organ Builder*. n.p., Musical Opinion Limited, [1995].

41 Personal association with these instruments.

42 See Plumley, N. M., *The Organs of The City of London. From Restoration to the Present*. Oxford, Positif Press, 1996, 164, for details and specification of this instrument.

43 Personal association with this instrument.

44 Such as the ex-organ in Holy Trinity Church Ripon, North Yorkshire. Organ removed 2002.

45 Such as the 1879 John Laycock organ at St. Nicholas' Church, Sabden, Clitheroe, Lancashire. Personal association with the instrument.

paper, such instruments appear inviting and many have indeed some very fine individual registers. However, because of the bent towards a more dignified sound, such stops as mixtures and fifteenth could be either lost in the swamp of sound created from the unison tones or be over bright and unbalanced with the rest of the instrument.<sup>46</sup> It is fair to equate that when trying to perform polyphonic music on instruments of the period, the results are (with the exception of the larger instruments) nine times out of ten unsatisfactory.

This 'stodgy diet of tone' is evident in the large and small instruments built by Hope-Jones. John Norman describes Hope-Jones' instruments as 'true octopods – all 8ft stops and the pipes either grossly fat (Tibias) or unbelievably etiolated (Violes d'Orchestre).'<sup>47</sup> Some of the instruments by Hope-Jones do contain 4ft' stops of flute and principal tone, such as St. Oswald's Hartlepool and St. Mary's Ambleside. At Ambleside Parish Church in Cumbria, their Hope-Jones organ also contains one stop at 2ft' pitch (fifteenth).<sup>48</sup> It is known that Hope-Jones added octave couplers to his instruments to achieve the effect of a 2ft' pitch, and again this is evident at Hartlepool and Ambleside. Hope-Jones' instruments were met with many mixed views:

One of the most remarkable exemplifications of organ building of the present day. (A. L. Peace, Organist of Glasgow Cathedral)<sup>49</sup>

An unqualified success. The new tone qualities introduced are excellent. (C. W. Perkins, Organist of Birmingham Town Hall)<sup>50</sup>

It reaches a standard of excellence far above anything I have seen before. (H. Blair, Organist of Worcester Cathedral.)<sup>51</sup>

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46 It may be fair to say that in respect of the latter, this is certainly the case when instruments have had upperwork added at a later date to brighten up a relatively dull sound. An example is the two manual Forster & Andrews (1890s) instrument in St. Helen's Church, Sheriff Hutton, near York, which had a fifteenth added to the great organ at some date during the mid twentieth century. Personal associations with this instrument.

47 Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. 112.

48 It is possible this 2ft' fifteenth stop on the great organ was an addition by Norman & Beard in the mid 1930s.

49 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 296.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

However, some organists were not as enthusiastic about his instruments and a letter in *Musical Opinion* of 1894 reports of a visitor, thoughtfully describing the tone of the organ of St. George Hanover Square, London as 'rather wearying.'<sup>52</sup> Sumner described the Hope-Jones instrument as being a 'one man orchestra'.<sup>53</sup> According, to Bicknell:

To one modern author he was 'a sort of *fin de siècle* *eminence grise*', whose instruments 'were incapable of playing any music ever written for the organ, another believes he was the builder of 'the worst organs ever made by a careful, professional builder.'<sup>54</sup>

Much of the failure of Hope-Jones' instruments, apart from the malicious gossip created by his rivals,<sup>55</sup> was to do with the fact that he was ahead of his time. His requirements on the electricity supply to operate his instruments were greater than that which could be produced at the period, and is thus one of the reasons why many of his instruments did not survive long in their original state. This is true in respect of the four manual instrument in St. Oswald's Parish Church, Hartlepool, on the North East Coast. This instrument only worked successfully for 30 years (the church was consecrated in 1904), and a present church member recently commented that he spent many an hour inside the organ and console in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s trying to repair electronic components to get the instrument to play. The instrument had to be powered by a separate generator that was run from a local power plant away from the church because there was not enough power to power the organ from the church's own supply. A large lever was situated next to the console to trigger the power, and this had to be activated before the worshippers arrived at Mass because the huge surge of power required to 'fire-up' would make the building shake. This also meant that the instrument had to be left running throughout the service, even to the displeasure of the parishioners who had to suffer the noise from the blower and the wind noises that ran underneath the nave flooring to supply the west-end solo horns mounted high above the font. This

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Sumner, W. L., *The Organ; Its Evolution, Principles of Construction and Use*. 228.

<sup>54</sup> Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 291.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 297.

instrument fell out of use in 1978 and has not been heard since. The cost of repair was, and still is, too great for the church to achieve, and is now beyond economical repair. The instrument is still present today and is housed in a very fine case designed by the church architect. There is a detached console in the traditional Hope-Jones style (in very poor condition) opposite the organ, but the music is now provided by an electronic substitution.<sup>56</sup> According to Bicknell, it was not surprising that many of Hope-Jones' instruments failed, considering his absence and the profound antagonism of those who took over the care of his instruments.<sup>57</sup> In 1979, John Hallworth wrote to *The Organ* supporting Hope-Jones, commenting that:

Robert Hope-Jones has been grossly maligned, misunderstood and falsely interpreted to the point of an extreme hypercriticism which I can only conclude was the result of an innate lack of understanding and ignorance in those who know little of the development of the electric action and the tonal disposition and apportionment of the classical unit extension organ.<sup>58</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century the organ was becoming even more separated from much of its legitimate repertoire, and according to Thistlethwaite,<sup>59</sup> on both sides of the Atlantic, builders were exploiting the technical possibilities of electric action from which sprouted the unit or extension organ, where one rank of pipes could be made available at several pitches. The work of Hope-Jones with his reduction of the organ to an extreme series of tonalities controlled by an electric console and the future work of Compton in England and Wurlitzer in America endeavoured to take the romantic organ one stage further from the work of the great nineteenth century builders. Their work took off in a new direction finding the organ new residence in the cinema. This gave the organ an acceptance out of the church and because of such, according to McCrea, distinctions between music styles blurred and it became acceptable to play the same repertoire in the church, concert hall, and cinema:

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56 Personal visit to St. Oswald's Hartlepool on 23/04/04 and discussions with parishioners about the fate of their Hope-Jones instrument.

57 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 297.

58 Hallworth, J., 'Robert Hope-Jones 1859-1914. An appraisalment.' *The Organ*, (1979), 156.

59 Thistlethwaite, N., 'Origins and Development of the Organ'. 16.



...it comes as no surprise to read an advertisement for Paxton's *The Organ Loft* from the 1920s which claims to be 'a series of 12 organ volumes [mostly original music] suitable for church, recital or cinema.'<sup>60</sup>

At a lecture given to the Royal College of Organists in 1910, Alfred Hollins urged for more concert repertoire to be able to bring out the best in the modern concert organ, and McCrea states that this indeed happened:

With numerous others (including Hollins, Purcell J. Mansfield, William Wolstenholme and William Faulkes), Edwin Lemare (1865-1934) and later Percy Whitlock (1903-46), as inheritors of the W. T. Best tradition, did just that with their concert overtures, sonatas, suites, scherzos, toccatas and innumerable characteristic pieces.<sup>61</sup>

Because of the fascination with technology and the possibilities it created for organ design, it was viewed, by some, as a negative stage in organ history as it led to a decline in 'true' organ construction. This fascination resulted in gadgetry such as thumb pistons, crescendo pedals, and octave and sub octave couplers, which ultimately led to showmanship to demonstrate it all, even if the music did not call for it. Such fascination was not just happening in Britain as Williams notes:

...by 1900 a German organ of 12 speaking stops could have as many as 12 'aids'. This was in addition to the Swell, which by then usually took the form of a cylinder rolled by the foot (*Walze*) and operating horizontal shutters.<sup>62</sup>

In 1978 Michael Sayer wrote a paper for *The Organ* concerning Parish Music commenting:

The period of 1920-1940 was the time of the cinema organ when organ builder's attention was concentrated on these lucrative and various tonal novelties and console gadgets were invented to impress the uncritical audiences who paid to watch the acrobatics of brylcreemed young men playing tunes with their feet on the rising and falling colour-illuminated switchboards of invisible one-man-bands. The cinema organist enjoyed a secure salary in economically poor times, many organists gained their formative experience in the picture-house and at least one cathedral organist (Norman Cocker of Manchester) was also employed in a nearby cinema. Church music was in decline again and poor taste prevailed in the parishes.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever personal gripes Sayer may have with the theatre organ's glamorous razzmatazz environment, the reality was that many thousands of people (not just the uncritical) enjoyed the showmanship and skill of the concert-cum-theatre organist.

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60 McCrea, A., 'British Organ Music after 1800'. 290.

61 Ibid.

62 Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1980, 168.

63 Sayer, Michael., 'Redesign and Renaissance – A Study in Parish Music Revival'. *The Organ*. (Jan. 1978), 129.

Laying the blame for poor taste and bad organ design on the theatre organ is unfair. In their own right they are quite marvellous instruments, ingeniously designed and when played straight (that is without the tremulants) can sound more plausible than some church organs.<sup>64</sup> To be able to construct an orchestra for one player is a great feat, specifically in the days when the sounds were real and not digitally created. Today, the theatre organ still has its following and such players are well recognised for their skill, (as known, Ralph Downes played the organ in his local cinema as a young man).<sup>65</sup> Even BBC Radio Two, after 40 years, continues to broadcast the popular show 'The Organist Entertains' which is presented by nationally known theatre organist, Nigel Ogden.<sup>66</sup>

Sayer states the period '1920 to 1940' as being popular for organ builders preoccupations with novelties. However, it is known that the organ contained 'novelties' well before 1920. Geoffrey Webber tells of the 'Toy Stops' included in two seventeenth century instruments; that being the Trommel (drum) at the Jakobikirche, Hamburg (Schnitger 1690-3) and a bird stop on the organ in the Marienkirche, Stralsund, Germany (F. Stellwagen 1659), which is a high pitched pipe placed in water.<sup>67</sup> James Dalton also notes the toy stops on the 1677 organ of the San Juan Bautista, Mondragón by Joseph de Echevarría. This organ contains Cascabeladas (little bells), Jugueros (moving figures in the case), Bordones de la Gaita Zamorana (bagpipe drones), and Atabales (drums).<sup>68</sup> As known, other novelties such as orchestral stops, crescendo pedals, and composition pistons were seen in the great nineteenth-century town hall and church instruments of Hill and Willis and the church and theatre-cum-concert instruments of Hope-Jones, Wurlitzer, and Compton of the early 1900s.

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64 This was evident when playing the Wurlitzer organ at The New Victoria Centre, Howden-le-Wear, near Crook, County Durham on 25/07/04.

65 Downes, R., *Baroque Tricks. Adventures with the Organ Builders*. 18.

66 BBC Radio 2 – *The Organist Entertains*. [www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/shows/organist](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/shows/organist) (accessed 24/04/04).

67 Webber, G., 'The North German Organ School'. in Thistlethwaite, N., and Webber, G., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 222.

68 Dalton, J., 'Iberian Organ music before 1700'. in Thistlethwaite, N., and Webber, G., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 166-7.

In his book about Lancashire organ builder Thomas Pendlebury, Bryan Hughes quotes an enlightening article from the 'Leigh Chronicle' of September 1909 reporting on the opening of the new three manual pipe organ for the Wesleyan Chapel in King Street, Leigh, Greater Manchester. This evidently was a great and historic day for the people of Leigh as, David Clegg, international recitalist and showman from London gave the opening recital

A large audience attended when the London recitalist David Clegg was invited to appear in Leigh... from the beginning he enraptured the crowd, and they listened spellbound during the performance that has probably never been excelled in the district... he rose to the greatest heights as a brilliant performer by his mastery rendering of Mendelssohn's "Finales" to the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Sonatas. The manner in which he swept the keyboards in the Allegro movements, his wonderful pedal work; roused the audience to enthusiasm... The finale event brought many of the audience to their feet as Mr Clegg ended with his 'Storm in Switzerland'... It was a wonderful feat of musical skill, and Mr Clegg was given hearty applause, which he acknowledged by playing 'Home Sweet Home' with many variations. The recital was one of the greatest musical treats ever provided in Leigh. So many people had to be turned away at this first performance that Mr Clegg was persuaded to repeat the recital the following evening, this he did to an overflowing audience.<sup>69</sup>

Hughes acknowledges that this newspaper report may have been exaggerated, though it nonetheless illustrates the enjoyment and excitement David Clegg's skill and musicianship gave to the vast audiences in Leigh. It is interesting to relate Sayer's comments to this occasion in Leigh, as this organ was not a theatre organ, but a church instrument.<sup>70</sup> David Clegg's skill clearly displayed the organ in a theatrical manner, and maybe more importantly, in a way that was appealing to a vast audience. Many other recitalists of the period, and earlier, also performed in such a manner, including William T. Best, Edwin Lemare, Norman Cocker, and Reginald Dixon. Therefore, these performers surely deserve respect and admiration, rather than plain condemnation on the sole grounds of one's preconceived ideas of bad taste. These recitalists were providing a service at the request of others, (it may have not been their personal preference to play this way) and at their time were equivalent to the famous English organ recitalists of

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69 Hughes, B., *Thomas Pendlebury A Lancashire Craftsman*. (Extracts from the Leigh Chronicle, Sept 1909). Wigan, Owl Books, 1993, 38, 40, 41.

70 This organ no longer exists as the church was demolished in the early 1970s and was replaced by a more modern building. The new building contains a smaller two manual pipe organ by the third generation of Thomas Pendlebury, which is reported to be made up of some of the original organ pipework.

today such as Dame Gillian Weir, Carlo Curley, David Briggs, and Thomas Trotter. Sayer is right to acknowledge that the theatre organ did distract organ builders attention to console gadgetry to impress the audiences, but one contemplates whether the aftermath of World War One put people into a process of philosophical thought, taking the attitude that life was too short to take serious, and with the prospects of a bleak future, anything that was virtuosic or blithe was seen as a god-send. Furthermore, let us remember that not all organ builders of the period built theatre organs.

However, differentiating tastes, fancy footwork, numerous stop changes, and showmanship became ammunition for those concerned with the direction the organ had taken, and was taking universally:

Organs in Europe and America alike were often still 'Romantic' or 'Symphonic' in general style and it was the realisation of the fact that the parts in contrapuntal music were not clearly heard, or that an organ was more than a collection of orchestral tone-colours, which fed much of the development of the neo-Baroque organ of the mid twentieth century.<sup>71</sup>

The twentieth century saw the romantic styled instruments (built by the aforementioned British builders, and also those built in other countries by such as Cavaillé-Coll in Paris, Walcker in Ludwigsburg, Sauer in Frankfurt, and Skinner in America) become the targets to much criticism. By the 1920s, attempts were being made in Germany to achieve a more classical sound or baroque styled instrument, which in time would have detrimental effects on the British romantic instrument, its players, and listeners.

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71 Hoyle, T., 'Thoughts on the formative years prior to 1954 – the opening of the Royal Festival Hall organ and E. Power Biggs' first European recording tour'. *Organists Review*, (Feb 2004), 32.

## Chapter Two

### The Organ Reform Movement; The beginning

Over the centuries, poor communications between countries has resulted in the separate direction the development of the organ has taken. During the 1850s, the English organ builders had, according to Thistlethwaite, absorbed German influences and foreign travel in a fitful and largely unsympathetic way.<sup>1</sup> By way of example, it was common that many nineteenth century organs contained stop lists of English, German, and French nomenclature. Although, in reality the foreign stop names were just names disguising English voiced pipes. Foreign stop names appeared on consoles to make instruments appear more impressive than they really were. For example, Walker included a gedact and spitzflote on the 1861 organ for St. Audeon, Dublin, but Walker himself had indicated that the pipe constructions he had in mind were stopped diapason and open diapason. Many other builders of the period however were less honest than Walker, and Thistlethwaite notes that 'it alerts us to the superficial nature of German influences in the work of many English builders at this period.'<sup>2</sup> It was not until communication and travel between countries became more accessible in the latter nineteenth century, and recordings of organ performances became available in the early twentieth century, that organ building practices passed more rapidly and accurately across the continent, and in particular between Germany and Great Britain.

The great appeal of the large romantic orchestral organs with their vast array of colours and technical gadgetry was not, according to Bicknell, to last forever.<sup>3</sup> Despite the best organs of the period, there was a small group of people who began to react against the romantic instrument, purporting that the true purpose of the organ had been lost. In Germany, Albert Schweitzer raised questions concerning the performances of

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1 Thistlethwaite, N., *The Making of the Victorian Organ*. 388.

2 Ibid., 389.

3 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 326.

Bach's organ music and their relation to the romantic instrument. The passion Schweitzer held for the music of J. S. Bach and his enthusiasm, namely to rediscover an organ suitable for the performance of the organ works of Bach, opened the flood gates to what became a universal movement.<sup>4</sup> It was thought the 'true purpose and nature' of the organ had 'declined' and required 'regeneration'<sup>5</sup> and that the historic principles in organ design, lost due to the technological revolutions of the nineteenth century, needed to be resurrected.

In 1896, Schweitzer visited the Liederhalle, in Stuttgart, to examine the new organ of the Stiftskirche, which had been given much praise.<sup>6</sup> Upon his arrival, and hearing organist Herr Lange perform a Bach fugue, Schweitzer wrote:

When I heard the harsh tone of the much belauded instrument and in a Bach fugue which Lange played to me perceived a chaos of sounds in which I could not distinguish the separate voices, my foreboding that the modern organ meant in that respect a step not forward but backward suddenly became a certainty.<sup>7</sup>

The conclusion may be drawn that the Stiftskirche organ was a romantic instrument. This is probable because Williams makes reference to instruments built in Germany by Weigle between 1890 and 1900 with a hard tone, high pressure reeds, and large-mouthed flues. Williams comments that this was shown by Schweitzer's opinion of the Liederhalle organ.<sup>8</sup>

After his examination of the Liederhalle instrument, Schweitzer spent much of his free time visiting organs, both old and new, discussing their suitability with almost every builder and player he met. He specifically deplored the heaviness and crudity of the average organ of the early 1900s and concluded that organs in Britain, France, and

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4 Schweitzer, A., *J. S. Bach. Volume 1*. London, A. & C. Black Ltd., 1905/1923, 295.

5 Williams, P., 'VII. The Organ Revival. England France and Italy'. in Sadie, S., ed., *Grove. Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Book 13*. Macmillan Publishers, Ltd, 1980, 770.

6 Phelps, L. *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. Church Music Biannual, Missouri, 1967, <http://www.lawrencephelps.com> (accessed 18/11/03), 1.

7 Ibid.

8 Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. 169.

Germany were not suitable instruments to execute the organ works of Bach<sup>9</sup> and commented that 'the older organs are becoming scarcer and scarcer. There are many organists today who have never heard Bach played on the kind of organ the composer had in view when he wrote.'<sup>10</sup>

Schweitzer disliked the fact that organ building was being invaded and ruled by industrial culture, and that the machine like qualities of new organs were as much a matter of pride and admiration as the tonal context, if not more.<sup>11</sup> The vast registrational and dynamic possibilities of the romantic organ from *ppp* to *fff* by means of swells and high wind pressures to large scaled pipes led Schweitzer to draw the following conclusion:

We have achieved infinite possibilities in registration, the power of gradual variation for *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, and, by means of the swells, a certain power of tone nuance. But we have lost the old tone of the organ Bach wrote for; and, since the tone is the chief thing, it must be said that the modern organ is not so suitable for Bach playing as is generally supposed.<sup>12</sup>

Schweitzer continued to question the modern organ, and complained about its forced tone and steady wind pressures, with registers voiced too loudly or too softly. He argued that 'in our passion for strength of tone, we have forgotten beauty and richness of tone, which depended upon the harmonious blending of ideally voiced styles.'<sup>13</sup> Schweitzer rejected the orchestral tones of the organ, he condemned the scientific scaling methods of Schulze and Topfer that were highly influential in Germany, England, and America, and fought for a return to pipe scaling practices of historic builders that were not based on the theories of physics. By returning to early pipe scaling practices, reinstating slider windchests, mechanical action, and low wind pressures, Schweitzer believed the results would be more musical, allowing clearer musical phrases.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. 97.

10 Schweitzer, A., *J. S. Bach*. 296.

11 Bicknell, S., 'Organ Building Today'. in Thistlethwaite, N., and Webber, G., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 82.

12 Schweitzer, A., *J. S. Bach*. 295.

13 Ibid., 296.

14 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 2.

In 1906, ten years after visiting Liederhalle and further study, Schweitzer produced a pamphlet entitled 'The Art of Organ Building and Organ Playing in Germany and France'. This pamphlet, according to Phelps, condemns the organ builders for their commercialism and indifference in respect of tonality and craftsmanship, and sheds much light on mechanical design, construction, and placement of the organ.<sup>15</sup> This was the first document written in connection with reviving the organ and was influential in 1926 at the Freiberg Organ Conference. Surprisingly, Phelps raises an interesting issue concerning the validity of Schweitzer's arguments. Schweitzer, according to Phelps, was 'interested in the instruments of Bach's time only as a point of departure.'<sup>16</sup> It is apparent that Schweitzer was a great admirer of the tonal qualities in the organs built by Frenchman Cavaillé-Coll. This is evident in a footnote to Schweitzer's section on registering Bach's organ works in his 1905 Treatise:

...the diapasons and mixtures of the Cavaillé-Coll organs seem made for it [Bach playing], this builder having been particularly anxious to avoid abnormal strong and "solid" voicing. On the great organs of St. Sulpice and Notre-Dame, Bach's fugues come out with extraordinary clearness. One of the finest Bach organs in existence is the one, rich in mixtures, that adorns the Cavaillé-Coll *atelier* in Paris (15 Avenue du Maine).<sup>17</sup>

Phelps believed that Schweitzer had no real appreciation or understanding of the organ as a polyphonic instrument.<sup>18</sup> This may have been a fair accusation to make, because at the time Phelps was writing (c1967), the advances and rediscoveries made in organ design had far surpassed Schweitzer's initial theories. However, first, if looking at Schweitzer's treatise of 1905, he writes the following, which gives the reader some evidence of his appreciation of the polyphonic instrument:

If we play Bach on an old and well preserved Silbermann organ... both the inner parts and the pedal come out clearly, whereas on the modern organ the inner parts are confused, and the pedal, by reason of its deficiency in four-feet stops and mixtures, and its inferiority in weight to the enormous masses of tone above it, cannot, even at its most brutal, throw out a clear line.<sup>19</sup>

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15 Ibid., 1.

16 Ibid.

17 Schweitzer, A., *J. S. Bach*. 299.

18 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 2.

19 Ibid., 296-7.



Secondly, in support of Schweitzer's claims that Cavaillé-Coll's instruments are suitable for Bach's organ music, attention must be drawn to the recording of Bach's Passacaglia in C minor played by Sophie Véronique Cauchefer-Choplin on the organ at St. Sulpice, Paris.<sup>20</sup> Cauchefer-Choplin manages to create a very convincing baroque organ sound by careful choice of registration and colour, and one may be mistaken to think that this is indeed a baroque instrument when listening.

For Schweitzer to write so enthusiastically about the organs built by Cavaillé-Coll might be surprising at first, yet it may be assumed that his affections for Cavaillé-Coll's instrument at St. Sulpice, in particular, may be due to the fact that when Cavaillé-Coll rebuilt the organ between 1858-63, he conserved much of the previous organ by Clicquot (1781), with the intention of realising the older style of organ building with the new.<sup>21</sup> Daniel Roth, Organist Titulaire at St. Sulpice has described the instrument as:

[In fact], this instrument should not be viewed as that of a romantic-symphonic style, which many may suggest. Instead, the creator desired an instrument where the classic tradition and the new romantic style are intimately linked!<sup>22</sup>

Because of the above, and the fact that Clicquot was known throughout Europe for his fine low pressure reeds and mixtures,<sup>23</sup> Schweitzer may have contemplated that this organ sounded suitably baroque, and would therefore be suitable for Bach's organ music, even though Bach himself would never have played the instrument. Because of his preference towards Cavaillé-Coll's instruments, Schweitzer was, according to Phelps, 'resented in Germany'. When the Freiberg Organ Conference commenced, Schweitzer's ideals were seen as a starting point and he was demoted to the role of 'grand old man.'<sup>24</sup>

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20 Sophie Véronique Cauchefer-Choplin. Saint-Sulpice Paris. Track One. CD Festivo 6941 732, [no date].

21 Ibid.

22 Roth, D., *Le Grand Orgue de Saint Sulpice*. [www.stsulpice.com](http://www.stsulpice.com) (accessed 18/05/04), 2.

23 Sumner, W. L., *The Organ; Its Evolution, Principles of Construction and Use*. 202.

24 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 2.

The work of Schweitzer began to draw the attention of the discerning musician towards the true nature of the organ as a musical instrument. At the 1909 Vienna International Musical Society a section of the conference was dedicated to organ building. German musicians gradually started to reconsider the romantic organ, and this resulted in a protest against the thick and loud tones of the orchestral organ, the factory organ, the expressive organ, and the organ as an engineered machine rather than an apparatus or tool of music.<sup>25</sup> In response, a practical step was taken by the organ building firm Walcker and Wilibald Gurlitt of the University of Freiberg in 1921. They designed, and built, a new organ, which aimed at returning to the tonal characteristics of organ building according to details given by Praetorius in his *De Organographica* of 1618.<sup>26</sup> This instrument was the first major step forward in German organ design, and was named the 'Freiberg Praetorius Organ', receiving much publicity in 1926 at the Freiberg Organ Conference. This instrument did, however, have compromises in its construction. The action was electro-pneumatic and there was no casework. The overall success of this instrument was its sound, very much in the same way the instrument built for The Royal Festival Hall, London was, (which incidentally was the first major instrument in Britain to employ classical voicing principles).<sup>27</sup>

The Freiberg Organ Conference of 1926 assembled under the leadership of Christhard Mahrenholz, one of Germany's leading liturgical experts and reformers. The Freiberg Organ Conference, like Schweitzer, questioned the validity of using scientific methods for pipe scales, and posed questions relating to whether old master builders kept strictly to sacred numbers in the calculation of organ scales, or whether their

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25 Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. 180.

26 Ibid., 182.

27 As shall be seen in chapter four, this instrument, which was built thirty three years after the Freiberg instrument, has many of the same compromises in terms of action and casework.

artistic freedom got the better of them.<sup>28</sup> The Freiberg Conference led to a general surge of interest in the organ and the studies of pipe scalings, spreading throughout most of Europe and North America. As a result, much investigation was carried out into the work of Arp Schnitger (1648-1719) and his establishment of the North German and Dutch School of organ building.<sup>29</sup>

One aim of the organ reform movement<sup>30</sup> was to produce, or re-produce, an instrument with transparent tonal textures for the polyphonic music written. Hendrickson commented that polyphony was, and still is, considered by organists and organ builders to be a vital part of the instrument's heritage, as much of the greatest polyphony ever written was for the organ.<sup>31</sup> The organ needed to reclaim its place as a precise, articulate, prompt, responsive, clear, and clean musical instrument. These factors had not been a characteristic feature of the organ for many decades due to technological developments taking pride of place over traditional building practices. To achieve the aim, pipe scales have had to be studied and observed from the works of the old masters. Equally important is the reinstatement of the slider windchest, open toed (voiced) pipes with the avoidance of nicking, the employment of low wind pressures, and most importantly, in line with the requests of Schweitzer, the finest of materials.<sup>32</sup> In the early twentieth century, polyphonic organ music was rarely performed because instrument voicings were unsuitable. Organists who played trio sonatas, preludes, and fugues found that because of the thick tonal attributes of the organ, polyphonic lines were lost in a swamp of sound, and where an independent balanced pedal chorus was

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28 Mahrenholz, C., *The Calculation of Organ Pipe Scales from the Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century*. (Translated by A. H. Williams) Oxford, Postif Press, 1975, 5.

29 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 3.

30 The term Organ Revival or Organ Reform Movement is the British equivalent to the German term Orgelbewegung, coined about 1930 as a simplified form of Gurlitt's phrase *Orgel-Erneuerungsbewegung*. Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. 180.

31 Hendrickson, C., *Tonal Architecture IV*. The American Guild of Organists, 1999, [www.frontiernet.net/~soulek/articles/tonalarctwo.html](http://www.frontiernet.net/~soulek/articles/tonalarctwo.html) (accessed 24/11/03).

32 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 3.

required (not coupled to the manuals unless they were to be free from the hands), many instruments could not oblige

The organ reform movement must be given maximum credit for the revival of polyphonic organ music. The effort was important and continues as one of the foundations of modern pipe organ design. What we now take for granted in the organ's ability to perform the greatest classic polyphonic literature has been achieved only after many years of effort and a great deal of thoughts and dedication.<sup>33</sup>

It was sought, again in line with the aims set out by the organ reform movement, that the tonal design of the organ should be developed in line with the musical requirements to played, with polyphonic considerations given priority, but with room to allow suitable additions if funds permit.<sup>34</sup> In his second of eight essays on Tonal Architecture, Hendrickson describes how the organ builder, as a constructor of a musical instrument, is also a designer of sound and beauty, which goes far beyond the fabrication and materials used. 'The great instrument makers of the past (Stradivari, Silbermann, Graf) seemed able to produce instruments whose sound transcended the mere performance of music.'<sup>35</sup> The tonal architecture in organ design, according to Hendrickson, has taken many directions in that 'the tonal experiments that have succeeded in recent years are those that resurrected forgotten tonal elements from historic instruments.'<sup>36</sup>

Over the centuries, consideration of diverse national styles, the working backgrounds of builders, the pressures from clients, organists, advisors, and teachers have all contributed to the changing range of the instrument's tones and sounds. 'Attempting to achieve too broad a scope with too limited resources should be avoided, as this results in an instrument not really suitable for any literature and thus unworthy for the church.'<sup>37</sup> This comment by Phelps, can be linked with Rogg's comment made at

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33 Hendrickson, C., *Tonal Architecture IV*. The American Guild of Organists.

34 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 4.

35 Hendrickson, C., *Tonal Architecture II*. The American Guild of Organists, 1999, [www.frontiernet.net/~soulek/articles/tonalarctwo.html](http://www.frontiernet.net/~soulek/articles/tonalarctwo.html) (accessed 24/11/03).

36 Ibid.

37 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 4.

the beginning of chapter one, concerning the lack of focus the organ had because of individual's preconceptions and preferences.<sup>38</sup>

With regards to the key action, mechanical action was seen by the advocates of the organ form movement as the only acceptable form of action, basing their theory on the fact that the organ is a responsive keyboard instrument. As discussed, attached and detached consoles with tubular-pneumatic action or detached consoles with electric action hinder contact between the player and pipes, creating a false touch

Pneumatic action destroyed the unity and function of the various divisions and their placement. Electricity finally destroyed the musical contact between player and the sound producing source – the pipes.<sup>39</sup>

It was also seen as specifically pointless to build small organs with pneumatic action when mechanical action is an easier and less complex construction.<sup>40</sup>

In respect of the reviving the organ's tonal construction, the Werkprinzip design, developed in North Germany by the Schnitger School, was to be the guide for providing individuality between each division. To assure chorus completeness, at what ever size, a well defined contrast needed to be provided between each division in terms of pitch and tone. To achieve this, the principal stop on each division would be at a different pitch. For example, pedal 16 ft', hauptwerk 8 ft', oberwerk 4ft', and positiv 2ft'.

The physical arrangement of the instrument was also to be constructed in relation to the Werkprinzip design.<sup>41</sup> No instrument, according to the main points made at the Freiberg Organ Conference, should be placed in a chamber or side chapel (Schweitzer criticised the English organ for this) and the instrument must be encased and only open on the side of the listener. For an organ to speak freely, it needs to be positioned in a

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38 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach'. *The Musical Times*, (Mar 1970), 310.

39 Rowntree, J. & Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1. 1955 – 1974*. Oxford, Positif Press, 1975, 14.

40 An interesting example is the small one manual organ in Broughton Church, near Skipton, North Yorkshire, built by the Positive Organ Co, at the turn of the twentieth century. This instrument contains pneumatic action throughout, and upon inspection, although well made, it appears to have been effort wasted when a simple mechanical action would have been easier, specifically as the organ has no pedals. Personal visit to service the organ on 17/05/04.

41 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 4.

freestanding location towards the main listening area of the building, throwing the sound in one direction.<sup>42</sup> However, this is one area where organ builders and advisors have the least input because of the already existing physical designs of buildings.

It is important to realise that regardless of the studied practices of old master builders, the revival has been a process of trial and error, taking many years to discover or rediscover important ideas; one important rediscovery was the organ case. Some of the first (revived) instruments had no casework, exposing all their pipework; like the Praetorius/Freiberg Organ. The case-less organ was more a feature of the American organ and especially the work of Holtkamp, whose instruments, with a classical bent, were uncased displaying interesting arrangements of pipework. An example is the 1937 instrument for the Germanic Museum at Harvard University.<sup>43</sup> The importance of producing complete caseworks gradually regained importance when older historic instruments were studied in more detail. After the Second World War, and when funds permitted, complete caseworks were included in many new instruments. Complete caseworks, according to Phelps, allowed for maximum contrast between the sound of each division with maximum blend, resonance, balance, and warmth of tone.<sup>44</sup> The subject of organ caseworks however, goes beyond the scope of this Thesis.

Almost from the beginning of the revival there was a division between two groups of people. One group supported a strict revival focusing on restoration and reproduction of organs of the baroque period, whilst the other group were a little less high-bound. The latter group accepted the work of Schnitger as a general rule in respect of tonal ideas, scaling, and voicing,<sup>45</sup> but importantly realised that times had changed since the days of Bach, and that new music had been written by succeeding generations for their instruments. Therefore, this indicated a need for an instrument proficient in satisfying

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42 Ibid., 3-4.

43 Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. 188.

44 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 3-4.

45 Ibid., 3.

the needs of present day musical requirements, but also capable of performing the music of Bach and his predecessors. This group studied with great care every feature and detail of the organ, like the different types of key and stop action, pipe voicing, and general layout, in order that the strict practices of the purists (the first group) would not be imposed upon them without having sufficient valid ammunition to support their reasons for modern thought.

In 1938, Mahrenholz wrote a small pamphlet entitled 'Funzehn Jahre Orgelbewegung' to commemorate the first German organ conference. The pamphlet, according to Phelps, makes it clear that the last decade had seen many divergences of practice and many mistakes made. However, more importantly was that general convictions were deepening in favour of the revived instrument.<sup>46</sup> The failure of the eclectic instrument was made pointing out that such instruments suited the romantic repertoire better than the baroque, and in conclusion, Mahrenholz called for a closer unity in achieving the ideals the organ reform movement set out to conquer.<sup>47</sup>

The outbreak of World War Two soon put a stop to work in Germany for several years, and in 1944 the Freiberg Praetorius Organ of 1921 was destroyed by fire. Ten years later this instrument was rebuilt, again with Gurlitt as advisor, but now with Walcker-Mayer as builders. The new instrument was modelled on the first specification in Praetorius' *De Organographica*, unlike the previous instrument which was designed according to some details in the *Organographica*, but with data taken from the existing pipework by Praetorius's acquaintance Compenius.<sup>48</sup> This new instrument had mean-tone tuning, slider chests, mechanical action, and a Werkprinzip design. It is interesting that even here, the specification of the pedal and brustpositiv are not absolutely true to the principle of principal choruses in a Werkprinzip design. The pedal specification is

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., 5.

48 Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. 183.

16ft', 16ft', 8ft', 2ft', 1ft', and Brustpositiv specification is 8ft', 1½ft', IIft', 1ft'.<sup>49</sup> This instrument, with a less compromising approach than the previous one, indicated how German thinking had evolved over the thirty years. Williams hypothesises that if a third Praetorius styled organ had been built, all compromises in specification would be disregarded and a casework in the seventeenth century style would be incorporated as an integral part of the sound production.<sup>50</sup> Sumner acknowledged, thirty years earlier than Williams, that Praetorius was not always a reliable historian in his statements about early instruments, but rather that he gave an excellent picture of sixteenth-century organs and glimpses of those of the gothic period.<sup>51</sup>

After the Second World War, the establishment of small independent European organ builders helped gain success for the revived organ. These small, new firms, often having much forward looking vision, left the old established builders behind. The success of the smaller firms was partly due to the fact that the larger firms remained true to the commercialism that had brought them success in the early days, and partly down to the cost factor of producing a new instrument.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst the organ revival continued to progress in Germany, it was the Dutch who were making headway with organ design. Denmark produced organs of very high standards, and much value can be seen in with the work of Syband Zachariassen. In 1920, Zachariassen became head of Marcussen & Son of Denmark. Restorations of old instruments with mechanical action and slider chests, led him to witness the superiority of these constructions, which he then employed in his new instruments. Shortly after taking over the leadership of Marcussen, Zachariassen was joined by Poul-Gerhard Andersen who had a keen interest in the architecture of the instrument. By the end of

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49 Ibid., For full specification of this instrument see table 32, page 183.

50 Ibid., 183.

51 Sumner, W. L., *The Organ*. 47.

52 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 6.



the 1930s his firm only produced instruments with mechanical action. They also led the field in the excellence of case design, and according to Phelps 'nearly every other aspect of organ building'.<sup>53</sup> It was Marcussen's open toed voicing principle, adopted in the 1950s, that became standard throughout Scandinavia, thus making their instruments so successful.<sup>54</sup> The work of Flentrop, in Zaandam, produced instruments that had fine mechanical action and well designed cases, and the firm of Frobenius, established in Copenhagen, produced instruments of very high quality, which were highly influenced by the work of Marcussen. The success, specifically of Marcussen, Flentrop, and Frobenius has led to many of their instruments being imported all over the world and specifically to Britain. In 1965 The Queen's College Chapel, Oxford installed a two manual and pedal instrument by Frobenius; in 1973 Eton School installed a two manual and pedal instrument by Flentrop; in 1973 St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham installed a two manual and pedal instrument by Marcussen; and in 1995-96 The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester installed a large four manual and pedal instrument, again by Marcussen. These aforementioned instruments, as with the many new neo-classical instruments built the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, by British builders (inspired by the European organ builders), have (as shall be seen in the next chapters), demonstrated that there is much mileage left in the organ, and have continued to promote its title as 'King of Instruments', even though their early reception was far from accommodating amongst the many British organists.

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<sup>53</sup> Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

### *Chapter Three*

## Authenticity and the organ, with references to the organ works of J. S. Bach

A composer of the past conceived his works in terms of the musical sounds of his own day, just as a twentieth-century composer does, and if we are to do justice to old music we must do our best to discover what the sonorities were.<sup>1</sup>

As has been shown in chapter two, the work of Schweitzer, namely to rediscover an organ suitable for Bach's organ music, sparked interest in authentic performances of these works. From studies of the organs Bach played, it has shown that they were very different to that which had become the norm in Britain in respect of chorus structure, division layout, console layout, and the position of the instrument. These findings led to more questions being raised regarding how one should now perform Bach's organ music in light of appropriate registration and manual changes, as what had gone before was obviously incorrect. The twentieth-century organ revival can be seen as a way to recover the art of performing early organ repertoire which had been neglected and rejected by the romantics by either unawareness or arrogance, and further on in this chapter, articles written by influential figures in the twentieth century will be examined in relation to these works by Bach .

During the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century (as shall be shown below), many musicians believed that composers of earlier periods would much have preferred to hear their music played on modern instruments, rather than on the 'imperfect' instruments of their time. Le Huray draws attention to the fact that it was only in the latter decades of the twentieth century that professional musicians began to take an active interest in authentic performances, and the authentic reproduction of historical instruments.<sup>2</sup> This is true in respect of the organ, (shown in chapter two and

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1 Dart, T., *The Interpretation of Music*. London, Hutchinson & Co (Publishers) Ltd., 1954, 1967, 29.

2 le Huray, P., *Authenticity in Performance*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, 1.

chapter four) as many organists and musicians (over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) have implied, or out rightly claimed that the organ music of J. S. Bach, for example, sounds much better on the modern organ, and that Bach would have preferred such an instrument if only they had existed during his lifetime. More often than not, organists based their views on personal preference and ignorance, believing the instrument of their time to be far superior to its predecessor. It can be seen that Thurston Dart, who was writing thirty-six years earlier than le Huray, is already questioning this overconfident view of new being superior to old. Dart saw this as pompous and presumptuous, and wrote the following defending historical composers and instruments:

...the alternative, according to the evolutionists, is to assume that all early composers whatsoever would have preferred to use the instruments of our own time, a point of view that makes us appear impossibly conceited and arrogant.<sup>3</sup>

Growing interest in old music, according to Mayer Brown, was due to a reaction against romanticism and the increasing secularism of age,<sup>4</sup> and this, in the twentieth-century according to Kenyon, began to have great effect on musicians, not only changing the way repertoire was chosen, but the way the music was heard by the listener

No change has more profoundly influenced the development of our music making during the last two decades than the growth of the historical performance movement.<sup>5</sup>

It is acknowledged by authors such as Mayer Brown,<sup>6</sup> Kenyon,<sup>7</sup> and le Huray<sup>8</sup> that in the early twentieth century, one of the first people to manifest an interest in the interpretation of early music was Arnold Dolmetsch in his treatise of 1915. Dolmetsch, was committed to the idea that performers should try to play music in the way

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3 Dart, T., *The Interpretation of Music*. 30.

4 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement'. in Kenyon, N., ed., *Authenticity and Early Music*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, 36.

5 Kenyon, N., 'Authenticity and Early Music. Some issues and questions'. in Kenyon, N., ed., *Authenticity and Early Music*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, 1.

6 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement'. 34.

7 Kenyon, N., 'Authenticity and Early Music. Some issues and questions'. 2.

8 le Huray, P., *Authenticity in Performance*. 1.

composers intended, and from such, he gained the title as the founding father of the 'cult authenticity'.<sup>9</sup> The work of Dolmetsch has had great influence on succeeding generations of musicians such as Robert Donnington and Thurston Dart, and his long line of achievements appear somewhat astonishing. 'It is no exaggeration to say that even today almost everyone involved in early music in England has been touched in some way by Dolmetsch, by his students, or by his students' students.'<sup>10</sup> Dolmetsch built harpsichords,<sup>11</sup> lutes, viols, and recorders; wrote a treatise on the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and played in concerts on instruments he had built and collected. 'In learning how to build copies of old instruments Dolmetsch, more than anyone else of his time, faced the principal dilemma of all early instrument makers in the twentieth century.'<sup>12</sup>

In his treatise, Dolmetsch briefly draws attention to the direction the organ was taking at the opening of the twentieth century, and questions the validity of the romantic instrument as being suitable for early music: 'Modern compositions are intended for this machine, and all is well with them; but it is a revelation to hear Handel's or Bach's music on a well-preserved old organ.'<sup>13</sup>

Interest in early music however, is not a new phenomenon. Mayer Brown acknowledges that by the second half of the sixteenth century, musicians regularly performed music that was at least fifty years old, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth

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9 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement', 39.  
10 Ibid., 40.

11 It is evident that Dolmetsch had a mature knowledge of harpsichord construction as Raymond Russell illuminates when documenting an eighteenth century harpsichord which was acquired by Dolmetsch. He says 'This instrument was acquired by the late Arnold Dolmetsch on the understanding that it had come from Spain...At that time the instrument contained hammer action, but Dolmetsch, who was certain that that was a later modification, rebuilt the instrument with jack action and two unison stops.' See Russell, R., *The Harpsichord and Clavichord*. London, 3 Queen Square, Faber and Faber. 1959/1973. Illustration 102A.

12 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement', 41.

13 Dolmetsch, A., *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*. London, Novello & Company, Ltd., [1915], 437.

centuries scholars took great interest in the performance of music of earlier periods.<sup>14</sup> It is known that Bach was familiar with music from the sixteenth-century and is reported to have arranged a Palestrina Mass for performance with wind instruments, double bass, and organ accompaniment.<sup>15</sup> He is also known for transcribing existing violin concertos, often by Vivaldi, to be played on the organ or harpsichord, writing out ornaments, occasionally reinforcing the counterpoint, and sometimes adding inner voices.<sup>16</sup> Bach had a comprehensive knowledge of the musical history of seventeenth-century Italy, being familiar with the music of Corelli, Albinoni, Bonporti, and Vivaldi; he is also known to have possessed a volume of music by Frescobaldi.<sup>17</sup>

Early music in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland was the territory of the academics and amateurs, while Paris saw the rise of the first great virtuoso.<sup>18</sup> Wanda Landowska, who immigrated to France from Poland in 1900, was the first person to specialise in the performance of music from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gaining a high reputation as a pianist and eventually as a harpsichordist. Originally, training as a classical pianist, she gradually came to realise, after some opposition, that the music she was interested in sounded much better on the harpsichord.<sup>19</sup> Landowska was not alone in France in the promotion of early music. Charles Borders, the organist of St. Gervais, Paris, had since 1892 devoted himself to the performance of sacred and secular polyphony from the French and Italian Renaissance, and in 1894 alongside Guilmant and d'Indy, established the Scholar Cantorum in Paris for the revival of old church music.<sup>20</sup> In London during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

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14 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement', 31-2.

15 David, H. T. & Mendal, A., *The New Bach Reader, The Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in letters and documents*. 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, 10.

16 Grout, D. J. & Palisca, C. V., *A History of Western Music*. Fifth Edition. 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1996, 405.

17 David, H. T. & Mendal, A., *The New Bach Reader, The Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in letters and documents*. 10.

18 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement', 37.

19 Ibid., 38.

20 Ibid.

according to Mayer Brown, *The Academy of Ancient Music and The Concerts of Ancient Music* organised performances of early music centred round early English church music, and specifically the music of Purcell and Handel.<sup>21</sup> It is known that when S. S. Wesley directed the 1834 Three Choirs Festival, held in Hereford Cathedral, music included Handel's 'Ode to St. Cecilia's Day' (1739); Dettingen Te Deum (1743); selections from 'Judas Maccabaeus' (1747); and Mozart's 'Requiem' (1791).<sup>22</sup>

In twentieth century Britain, Paul Steinitz (1909-88) became interested in the authentic performances of the music of Bach, and this is signified by his directorship of his local choral society in the performances of Bach's B Minor Mass, St. Matthew Passion, and Christmas Oratorio in the 1930s. Plummer writes that:

From the start, he insisted on the highest possible standards, using professional musicians where necessary. At the same time his curiosity was aroused as to how the music must have sounded in Bach's day.<sup>23</sup>

Steinitz was influenced by the work of Schweitzer; the performances of Bach's keyboard works on the Harpsichord by Landowska; Adolf Busch's recognition of the importance of dance in baroque music; and the work of Dolmetsch. In response he established The London Bach Choir in November 1946.<sup>24</sup> By the 1960s, The London Bach Choir was introducing more period instruments into their performances. Instruments like the sackbut and baroque flute replaced trombones and the modern concert flute, and such use of baroque instruments gained support from other groups and soloists. Musicians such as Roger Norrington and John Elliot Gardiner drew large audiences for concerts given on period instruments.<sup>25</sup> The success of The Early Music Consort, founded in 1967 by David Munrow; The Sixteen, founded in 1977 by Harry Christophers; and The Yorkshire Bach Choir, founded in 1979 by Peter Seymour have

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21 Ibid., 32-3.

22 Chappell, P., *Dr. S. S. Wesley. Portrait of a Victorian Musician*. Essex, Great Wakering Essex, Mayhew-Crimond Ltd., 1977, 28.

23 Plummer, S. S., *London Bach Society. Our 50 Year History*. [www.bachlive.co.uk/history](http://www.bachlive.co.uk/history) (accessed 18/05/04), 1.

24 Ibid., 1.

25 Ibid., 3.

taken on international level with performances of forgotten (and familiar) repertoire played on period instruments. A major part of their work has been researching performance styles used at the time of compositions.<sup>26</sup>

It has also been necessary for modern instrumentalists to learn how to play the baroque instruments, for example the natural horn or oboe da caccia. In a recent discussion with a past member of the Yorkshire Bach Choir (1979-1992) it was made known that in the 1970s and mid 1980s there were many spilt notes and much out-of-tune playing when period instruments performed with the choir. This was due to the fact that instrumentalists had to affirm themselves with the methods and techniques of playing such instruments, which differed considerably from the modern successor. However, by the 1990s players were becoming more competent, confident, and knowledgeable with the period instruments. The out-of-tune playing was much less, though still evident at times, and such became accepted as 'baroque colour' and did not have the implications of incompetence or lack of experience that was once bestowed upon players. Such choir established the Yorkshire Baroque Soloists, which have won national acclaim.<sup>27</sup>

Almost at a stroke, early music was removed from the realms of a specialist activity for which special pleading had to be made, and put in a forum where it could compete on equal terms with any kind of music making.<sup>28</sup>

Authentic performances gave rise to period instrument building and instrument makers gained importance and new status. In the introduction to his book documenting the keyboard instruments at The Victoria and Albert Museum London, James Yorke informs the reader that because of the growing appreciation for historic instruments in

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26 The Yorkshire Bach Choir's programme notes for their performance of Monteverdi's Vespers held in Ripon Cathedral on 1/05/04. [no author of programme notes given]

27 Discussions with Mrs. L. M. Hewlett, member of the Yorkshire Bach Choir between 1979-1992, on 10/06/04.

28 Plummer, S. S., *London Bach Society. Our 50 Year History*. 3.

the recent years, measured drawings have been made of certain keyboard instruments which are held at the museum for those who wish to make copies of them.<sup>29</sup>

Instrument makers in the pre-war period, according to Mayer-Brown, failed to realise the importance of studying original instruments, even though standards of building were good.<sup>30</sup> They were more concerned with overcoming the difficulties encountered with the limited technologies of the past. One such example is harpsichord maker John Challis. Challis, an excellent craftsman who trained with Dolmetsch, went to work in America to build harpsichords that could survive the North American climate and stay in good tune; like pianos. According to Nurmi:

Challis's instruments have good volume and are extremely reliable because of excellent workmanship. They are modern instruments, and in recent years, Challis has used metal (aluminium or aluminium alloy) frames and soundboards on some instruments, with the result that they seem to stay in tune indefinitely.<sup>31</sup>

Even though Challis's instruments were well built, Mayer Brown states that 'it is not wholly unfair to claim that in his last years he began little by little to reinvent the piano.'<sup>32</sup> Kenyon informs the reader that specialist societies existed as early as 1937 building period instruments, and had it not been for their activities over the years, nothing could have happened so quickly in the professional field in the latter twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Kenyon makes no reference to the role of the organ when discussing the production of early instruments; he mentions recorders, viola da gambas, and harpsichords.<sup>34</sup> However, as discussed in chapter two, it was the 1921 Praetorius / Freiberg Organ that takes credit for setting wheels in motion. This instrument, and the effects of the Freiberg Organ Conference, influenced a succeeding number of musicians nationally in light of performing the organ music of J. S. Bach and his

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29 Yorke, J., *Keyboard Instruments at the Victoria and Albert Museum*. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1986, 9.

30 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement', 43.

31 Nurmi, R., *A Plain & Easy Introduction to the Harpsichord*. Mexico, University of New Mexico Press, 1974, 2.

32 Ibid.

33 Kenyon, N., 'Authenticity and Early Music'. 8.

34 The term 'early instruments' has many meanings, like 'authentic instruments', 'reproduced historic instruments', or 'copied early instruments'.



contemporaries. It is fair to equate that the high esteem J. S. Bach and his organ works are held in today owes much to the reproduction of the neo-classical organ and the ideas set out at the first Freiberg Organ Conference. It is now rare that one attends an organ recital in the twenty-first century when a piece of Bach's organ music or that of an earlier master is not performed. Earlier organ masters, such as Dietrich Buxtehude, (described by Josef Hedar as 'one of the greatest figures in the sphere of music in Northern Europe...undoubtedly, the most eminent master of the organ, before Johann Sebastian Bach')<sup>35</sup> Jan Pieterszen Sweelinck, and Francois Couperin, have also come to light during the twentieth century, but their life and work extends way beyond the boundaries of this thesis.

When the nineteenth-century romantic organ was at the height of its popularity, specifically in Great Britain, it changed the direction of organ performance, establishing a new school and repertoire. At the same time the art of performing early organ music was forgotten and neglected, as was the music itself. The technological advances made to satisfy the orchestralised style of playing like, the employment of pneumatics and electricity; larger and more user friendly consoles; concaved pedalboards; and higher wind pressures, all contributed to the changing direction. To be fair, such a prospect at the time must have being hugely exciting, and therefore, perhaps, comes as no real surprise that earlier repertoires and performance practices were cast aside, specifically in Britain when most organ music was for manuals only. According to Marie-Clairé Alain it has taken organists many years to realise that each period of music history has its own performance practices connected with the instruments of the day, and that it is no longer possible for organists to ignore these. The idea that an organ of an earlier era is played in a much different manner to that of a later era is now firmly established:

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35 Hedar, J., Preface to Dietrich Buxtehude's Organ Works, Vol.II. Wilhelm Hansen Edition, No.3922, 1952.

This evolution, which took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by no means constitutes an improvement in playing styles, it simply reflects the birth of another type of organ (or perhaps several other types of organs) for which another type of literature was written.<sup>36</sup>

The majority of professionally trained organists must, in this day and age, be aware of some issues that surround authenticity and authentic performances of Bach's organ works. It is accepted as the norm, and taken for granted, that players of the twenty-first century will register Bach's organ music nearest to the way he himself would have done. A learned performer will no longer play Bach's organ works (or even that of earlier masters) on large diapasons and harmonic flutes in favour of principal choruses and mixtures; nor will a performer employ use of the swell box to create orchestralised dynamics as had been thought the norm throughout nineteenth-century Britain. When preparing this thesis, Dr. J. Inglis told me that in the mid part of the twentieth century he was heavily criticised in the LRAM organ diploma for having too little registrational variety in the prescribed organ work by Bach.<sup>37</sup> Today this seems hard to believe, when the prevailing view is that Bach's organ works should be played on one continuous registration, or played with very little registrational change. As shall be drawn upon, it has taken writers many years to come to some agreement on what is authentic and what is not, and even currently, there is still no absolute answer:

Very few performances stand or fall just on the question of whether or not they are authentic. We should take care not to confuse historical with aesthetic questions, for the latter are often simply questions of personal taste. But they often involve, too, matters of propriety, decorum, and imagination. The test of a good performance more often than not is surely whether or not the music was projected with vitality and musical imagination, or whether or not the performers have in fact brought the music to life. The relation between that process and the rediscovery of past instruments and past playing techniques is a controversial area.<sup>38</sup>

In connection with the performances of Bach's organ music in English speaking countries, according to Rogg, the main problem is the requirements of style and the suitability of the instruments:

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36 Alain, M. C., 'Why an Acquaintance with Early Organs is Essential for playing Bach'. in Stauffer, G., and May, E., ed., *J. S. Bach as Organist*. Indiana University Press, 1986, 48.

37 Discussions with Dr. J. Inglis, organist of St, Michael's Church, Coxwold, North Yorkshire, on 29/11/03.

38 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement'. 56.

...should we try to play, and register, Bach's music as he would have done himself?...First we do not work in the same conditions. Second, any performance implies an act of creation, and in consequence and element of risk; living art inevitably involves risk. In so far as the image of Bach himself playing his compositions may stimulate our creative imaginations it is essential; but if it makes us afraid of doing something wrong, through ignorance, and leads us to limit our eloquence, historical respect becomes a millstone rather than a lifebelt.<sup>39</sup>

and Mayer Brown is seen to support such a view and asks 'should we play music in the way the composer intended it, or at the very least in a way his contemporaries could have heard it?'<sup>40</sup> To try and answer these questions, articles written by influential figures of the second half of the twentieth century will be examined in the below case study.

### Organ registration in Bach's organ music

In 1962, Walter Emery wrote to *The Musical Times* informing the reader that by 1910 organists were beginning to agree that Bach's organ music did not need all the variety it was given, and that it was thought by some that the music sounded better without the variety to bring out the structure.<sup>41</sup> Emery continues by noting that there seemed to be a parallel between the way the continuo parts of Bach's passions were played, and the way the preludes and fugues were played. He notes that it had been the norm to vary the continuo parts by alternating between harpsichord and organ, and believes this to have stemmed back to either Mendelssohn's performances of 'The Passions' in the early eighteen-hundreds, or with early nineteenth-century operatic practice. Therefore, he believed organists must have taken this idea of variation between instrument sounds and applied it to registering the organ preludes and fugues.<sup>42</sup>

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39 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach' 310.

40 Mayer Brown, H., 'Pedantry or Liberation? A sketch of the Historical Performance Movement'. 27.

41 Emery, W., 'On the Registration of Bach's Organ Preludes and Fugues, part 1'. *The Musical Times*. (Jun 1962), 396.

42 Ibid.

Emery made the point that much variety in registrational changes had been seen as a necessity in longer movements of Bach's works.<sup>43</sup> One can only assume that this nineteenth century practice was

- a) linked with the thinking that faced musicians, like C. P. E. Bach and Quantz in the 1750s, with regards to ornamentation, that the more highly ornamented the music, the less likely the musicians were to bore their audiences.<sup>44</sup> *or*
- b) connected with the showmanship of the concert organist and the expectations of the audiences for orchestral colour and variety. The mere thought of no registrational change in the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth would be conceived on behalf of the recitalist and the audience as terribly dull and unadventurous in whatever repertoire. The article 'Decoding Bach 3 – Stringing Along' written by Mark Argent for *The Musical Times* in 2000, acknowledged that it was only in later generations that the organ grew in terms of stops, registrational changes, and playing aids, hence the baroque organists would play on fixed combinations of sound and created expression by the use of skilful articulation.<sup>45</sup> *or*
- c) because the thick tones of nineteenth and early twentieth century organs became unbearable during contrapuntal music.

There are still some today who believe that Bach's organ music should be full of variety when played on the romantic instrument. When learning Bach's Passacaglia in C minor (BWV 582) with Ian Little (Director of Music at Ampleforth School, North Yorkshire) it was drawn upon that there must be minimal registrational change. It was agreed that a few manual changes should be made, a pedal reed added in the fugue, no break made between the passacaglia ending and fugue beginning, and that the opening

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43 Ibid.

44 Rangel – Ribeiro, V., *Baroque Music: A Practical Guild for the Performer*. 866 Third Avenue, New York, Schirmer Books, 1981, 5.

45 Argent, Mark., 'Decoding Bach 3 – Stringing Along'. *The Musical Times*. (Autumn 2000), 22.

pedal theme be played on pedal flues to mixture. However, when playing the aforementioned piece for Dr. Simon Lindley (Director of Music at Leeds Parish Church and City Organist) in the manner instructed by Ian Little, Dr. Lindley commented that there was too little variety in the performance and that almost every variation should have a registrational change. Dr. Lindley proceeded by demonstrating this, beginning the pedal theme with only a 16ft' Bourdon and adding individual stops at each variation by means of thumb pistons, arriving at full organ for the last few variations. A break was made between the passacaglia and fugue, with the fugue theme being introduced by a selection of 8ft' flutes, again building up to a tutti by means of thumb pistons and swells. In many respects this interpretation was equally musical, and although Dr. Lindley's interpretation would be classed as dated, it did work very well on the organ at Leeds Parish Church, sounding thrillingly exciting. When discussing this interpretation with Ian Little, he was somewhat dismissive about this style, giving the impression that it could be acceptable to entertain a massed crowd or for ones own amusement. However, it was drawn upon that because scholarship and thinking had progressed since the "piston mania"<sup>46</sup> days, and remembering this piece was to be performed for an examination, it would be most authentic to play the work with limited registrational changes, as that would be most true to the instruments Bach knew. Le Huray talks about the variations in the passacaglia asking 'how should a continuous variation form such as the C minor Passacaglia be registered.'<sup>47</sup> He comments on Williams suggesting that the passacaglia should be played on one continuous registration because of its continuing nature, but argues (against Williams) that the natural breaks in the music are an opportunity for change:

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46 See Alain, M. C., 'Why an Acquaintance with Early Organs is Essential for playing Bach' for her brief analysis of the organ after the development of technology and electricity, and the way performers took liberties with Bach's organ music. 49.

47 le Huray, P., *Authenticity in Performance*. 111.

Can it really have been the case that stop changes would *never* have been made, simply because they could not be controlled directly by the player? It would, after all, have been an unusual player who could have managed without a page turner, and the page turner could easily have done double duty as a stop puller.<sup>48</sup>

Le Huray supports his argument by concluding that because the passacaglia is a variation form, it offers many opportunities for change, and believes 'it would be a bold critic, then, who would maintain that registrational changes were never used in the Passacaglia.'<sup>49</sup> (How he would respond to Dr. Lindley's eccentric interpretation is not known.) It was decided that in respect of the circumstances the performance was to be held, (examination) a scholarly interpretation would be adopted, in lines with the views expressed by Ian Little and Peter le Huray, but not losing sight of the musical drive given in Dr. Lindley's performance. This proved to be the correct approach, as below are the comments made by the examiners Brian Hodge (PhD, MusM, FRCO, GRSM, ARCM) and Shelia Kent (MSc, GNSM, LTCL CertEd) for the examination:

Passacaglia in C Minor – J. S. Bach: A well shaped pedal opening. The contrapuntal section was steady and rhythmic and semiquaver figuration well controlled. Registration was well chosen and manual changes frequently managed...<sup>50</sup>

Organists like Dr. Lindley, today may be ridiculed for their approach, as the argument goes something like 'why bother playing with vast registrational changes when Bach's organs could not do it; the music does not need it.' However, like the theatre-cum-concert organists, who could do several things at once, it is nothing to be scathing about, as such performances have done much good for the popularity of the organ amongst the laity. A trace of envy can be detected on behalf of the purists when they criticise such eccentric performances; let it not be forgotten that Bach himself was a virtuoso organ recitalist appearing in public for almost fifty years,<sup>51</sup> and even earlier

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48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 112.

50 LTCL Organ Diploma Examination Report Sheet for this author. 03/07/03.

51 Alain, M. C., 'Why an Acquaintance with Early Organs is Essential for playing Bach'. 52.

than Bach, it is reported that Frescobaldi (1583-1643), the organist of St. Peter's Rome, played to an audience of 30,000 people.<sup>52</sup>

It is acknowledged (by the authors mentioned in this chapter), with respect of registration, that in the vast majority of Bach's organ music no registrations are given. This implies that Bach believed organists to be knowledgeable enough to choose appropriate registration. However, such has been misinterpreted because of ignorance to the organs Bach played. It had been assumed that the organs Bach played were the same as they are now, and that flamboyant registrational changes and crescendos were the norm. This has proved not to be the case, and has caused much upheaval between organists converting from one school of thought to another. In 1966, James Dalton wrote that:

Much of the variety in registration frequently heard in Bach performances is put in by organists who take the respectful if exaggerated view that Bach credited them with the ordinary intelligence of managing the instrument so resourcefully. So he did, of course, but perhaps not quite in the way they think...Generally Bach assumes that a player can select suitable combinations of stops at the correct basic pitch, but it does not follow from this that he has unlimited licence to manipulate the stops according to his fancy at various points in a piece.<sup>53</sup>

Rogg, however, believes that it is not absolutely necessary to register Bach's organ music in a way that Bach might have done, or more to the point, would it have been possible considering his organs were all very different?<sup>54</sup> It is known that Bach acted as an organ advisor and would suggest new registers to be included in new or existing instruments. Upon completion of the instruments advising over, he would be invited, by the town, to give a recital. Ulrich Dähert enlightens us on this in his essay "Organs Played and Tested by J. S. Bach", where he lists numerous instruments tried and tested by Bach.<sup>55</sup>

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52 Jacobs, A., *The Penguin Dictionary of Music. (Sixth Edition)* Harmondsworth, England, Penguin Books, Ltd., 1997. 153. It is reported that 30,000 people was an over-exaggerated claim made by a over enthusiastic reporter, but still illustrates that he was a popular recitalist.

53 Dalton, J., 'Bach Interpretation 1'. *The Musical Times*. (Apr 1966), 341.

54 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach'. 310.

55 Dähert, U., 'Organs Played and Tested by J. S. Bach'. in Stauffer, G., & May, E., ed., *J. S. Bach as Organist*. Indiana University Press, 1986, 3-24.

Although it is exciting to imagine the conditions Bach had, and is essential to appreciate and place this in a historical context, it only gives, according to Rogg 'a means for exploring the true significance of the work. The problem of performance is somewhat different.'<sup>56</sup> Emery comments that Bach specified organ pleno for a fair number of chorale preludes, but not the preludes and fugues.<sup>57</sup> However, Dalton does not seem to agree, and takes this one stage further, stating:

...if it is generally agreed (and I think it is) that there should be no registrational changes during most of the chorale preludes, trio sonata movements and the contrapuncti of the *Art of Fugue*, 'should there be apparently unprincipled freedom prevailing in the preludes and fugues?'<sup>58</sup>

According to Rogg, the organ world is made up of purists who publicly declare that a Bach performance should be this or that and nothing more 'our instrument is the unfortunate pray of purists and theoreticians'.<sup>59</sup> Possibly Rogg is firing this hit-back at the type of comments made above by Emery and Dalton. Nevertheless, Rogg continues by commenting on those who base their arguments on the fact that the chamber orchestra does not change instruments between movements and therefore neither should the organist change registration:

As for registration, there are the fanatics who discount the possibility of changing stops even between the movements of a trio sonata, arguing that in chamber music a classical trio is played by the same instruments from beginning to end...Is it really likely that Bach, the most imaginative composer ever of organ music, used his instruments in so limiting a manner?<sup>60</sup>

It may be assumed that registrational changes would have been achieved by changing manuals. The instruments Bach was associated with did not have combination pedals or thumb pistons to make quick stop changes. Also, because the stop jambs were flat and not angled at 45 degrees, and that the stop heads were large and bulkier than they are in many modern organs, it made it very difficult for the player to change stops, even when not playing, without having to get off the bench. 'Quick shifts in registration

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56 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach'. 310.

57 Emery, W., 'On the Registration of Bach's Organ Preludes and Fugues, part 2'. *The Musical Times*. (Jul 1962), 467.

58 Dalton, J., 'Bach Interpretation 1'. 341.

59 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach'. 310.

60 Ibid., 310 -12.



cannot be accomplished on a seventeenth-century organ by the performer alone. In some cases, the stop knobs are out of the organist's reach...'<sup>61</sup> Apart from the Toccata in D (BWV 538) and Prelude in E Flat (BWV 552), there are no indications in Bach's preludes regarding manual changes.<sup>62</sup> It is known that Bach wrote some instructions for fingering and ornamentation,<sup>63</sup> but with regards to stop and manual changes, it is often difficult to decipher what would be most acceptable. Some of the organ works have a clear point of change, such as Prelude in D major (BWV 532) bar 10-15, 16-96, and 96 (beat 3)-end. Others have a clear point of change to another manual, (i.e. from hauptwerk to positiv) but then no clear indication to return to the hauptwerk, such as Prelude in B minor (BWV 544) bar 17, Fugue in E flat (BWV 552) bar 37, or Passacaglia in C minor (BWV 582) bar 41. What Rogg argues is that if the manuals are coupled, say hauptwerk to positiv, then if one moves on to the positiv the line is not broken as it has always sounded:

The argument which decrees that we should never break the line disappears when it comes to coupling the keyboards. At such a movement, as long as it is properly handled, no line need be broken because the sound of the Positiv will be present throughout.<sup>64</sup>

Stauffer contemplates whether because there are no registrational indications in Bach's preludes, apart from BWV 583 and 552, did Bach intend the rest of the organ works to be performed on one sound? However, according to Stauffer, there is no manuscript or stylistic evidence that indicates the contrary.<sup>65</sup>

By contrast, suggested registration is to be found in almost every piece of French organ music published between 1660 and 1760 and le Huray points out that 'in certain cases, composers felt strongly enough about the sound, that they wanted to warn

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61 Vogel, H., 'North German Organ Building of the Late Seventeenth Century'. in Stauffer, G., & May, E., ed., *J. S. Bach as Organist*. Indiana University Press, 1986. 35-6.

62 Stauffer, G. B., *The Organ Preludes of Johann Sebastian Bach*. UMI Research Press, 1978/1980, 167.

63 Marshall, K. A., 'Survey of historical performance practices'. in Thistlethwaite, N., & Webber, G., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Organ*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 127.

64 Rogg, L., 'Interpreting Bach'. 312.

65 Stauffer, G. B., *The Organ Preludes of Johann Sebastian Bach*. 167.

players against tackling pieces unless all the necessary stops were available to them.’<sup>66</sup>

The early German instruments were less standardised than early French instruments in terms of stops for specific divisions, and the French instrument had all its pipework in one case, whilst the German instrument had each division of pipework in a separate case. Le Huray speculates that this lack of standardisation is a reason why German composers left the choice of stops to the player knowing each instrument would be different:

...North German organs tended to be far less standardised than the French ones. Probably for the same reason, German composers left the choice of stops to the player, knowing that each instrument would be different.<sup>67</sup>

The organs Bach played at Weimar and Arnstadt, for example, give some idea to this problem of non-standardisation, and as Williams comments: ‘no single organ that Bach is known to have played would all his organ music have sounded at its best or even given a registration suitable to its carefully conceived style and genre.’<sup>68</sup>

From the above it can be seen that the organ works of J. S. Bach have been of considerable importance in the quest to reviving the classical organ. In the next two chapters it is seen that with the reintroduction of mechanical key action and historical principles in voicing pipes, organists have considerably improved their playing technique and have been able to achieve a somewhat more intimate partnership between the music and instrument. In return, organists have been able to experience (possibly) some of the musical results Bach himself may have achieved.

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66 le Huray, P., *Authenticity in Performance*. 104.

67 Ibid., 105.

68 Williams, P., ‘The Organ of J. S. Bach’. in Sadie, S., ed., *Grove. Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Book 13*. Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1980, 756. and to see a variety of Bach’s registrations see Dähnert, U., ‘Organs Played and Tested by J. S. Bach’. 5,7,8,9,18-9.

## Chapter Four

### The early stages and reactions regarding the introduction of the neo-classical organ into Great Britain

O praise ye the Lord! All things that give sound;  
Each jubilant chord, Re-echo around;  
Loud organs his glory Forth tell in deep tone...<sup>1</sup>

If H. W. Barker (1821-77), the author of this hymn, had been influenced by the thundering English organs of the 1800s, it may be fair to ask rhetorically whether the words would have been different, had he been writing during the second half of the twentieth century with continental organ influences in full flow. Would Barker have written 'Loud organs his glory Forth tell in deep tone' to describe the tones of the neo-classical organ?<sup>2</sup> In light of the aggravation and controversy the neo-classical organ caused when thrust upon the British musical public in the twentieth century, it could be presumed that Barker would have chosen his words cautiously.

On the continent, and even in America, Schweitzer's theories of the early 1900s, and the effects of the 1926 Freiberg Organ Conference, were creating much attention and interest in reviving the organ. However, very few British organists and organ builders were aware of what was happening on the continent and those who were regarded it as something of a joke and an irrelevance.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, many nineteenth and early twentieth century English organs are not always suitable for authentic performances of baroque and earlier organ music, which is now thought necessary. They can be criticised for their heavy tone, lack of chorus structure, and high wind pressures. In contrapuntal music such criticisms are valid (as shown in chapter two). Nevertheless, the British 'romantic' organ, despite having less than a century of

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1 Barker, H. W., 'O praise ye the Lord. Hymn 427'. *The New English Hymnal*. Norwich, The Canterbury Press, 1986, 425.

2 The terms 'classical', 'neo-baroque', 'neo-classical' have been coined by the British to imply instruments that have followed or been highly influenced by the organ reform movement and its tenets set out in the 1920s at the Freiberg Conference.

3 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 328.

tradition, had by the early nineteenth hundreds made firm roots, and evolved into a musical instrument of high regard, built by skilled and dedicated craftsmen who often employed the best materials available to them and the latest technological advances. Many, but not all, were instruments to be proud of and the initial move towards a 'baroque sound' has shown to be not the easiest of steps to take, and has required over the years, much difficult discussions and 'ear bending' to prove otherwise.

These romantic instruments, which were highly favoured by the English, suited the vast solo and choral repertoire that had been written and arranged for them. In churches, cathedrals, and particularly in secular surroundings, the vast tonal pallet, and great dynamic range of the organ, (available by swells and orchestral effects) was exploited fully by their players, thus gaining the instrument popularity.

The English have always had a reputation for insular organ building practices, as known, it took many years to accept and adopt the German system of key compass and pedals. For example, in 1855, S. S. Wesley insisted that the new Willis organ for St. George's Hall, Liverpool must have long (GG) manual compasses, even though it had been almost twenty years since the introduction of the German system to Britain.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, to ask again or suggest that the British change a century later to another foreign ingredient in organ design comes as no real surprise that it was not welcomed with opened arms. In the first of his six articles entitled 'Raising the Tone', Bicknell refers to *The Musical Times* of 1863 in which an article described the insular state of British organ building, believing there be no need to look abroad for influences and ideas in organ design. Bicknell states that although this article was written in the middle of Queen Victoria's reign, it might well have been written today as the British have

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4 Chappell, P., *Dr. S. S. Wesley. Portrait of a Victorian Musician.* 89-90.

been very reluctant to change and adopt ideas; in the words of Bicknell 'history has repeated itself.'<sup>5</sup>

In 1926, Belgian organist Guy Weitz persuaded Willis III to add mutations to the choir division of the Anneessens organ at the Jesuit Church, London. With these stops, and the two mixtures on the great organ, and its independent pedal upperwork, the instrument took on something of a continental flavour.<sup>6</sup> This was not the personal preference of Willis, and even though he purported to have introduced this new thinking into Britain, it is ironic, and amusing, to learn that in later life he became highly opposed to baroque influences. He would impose his views on other organ builders, and gained a reputation for walking out of recitals on new instruments that were classically influenced.<sup>7</sup> However, for the next twenty or so years, the ideas of organ advisors like Thomas Casson and George Dixon kept the organ away from any great change,<sup>8</sup> and the splendid new instruments by the third generation of Willis for the Anglican Cathedral, Liverpool (1912-26) and Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral, London (1920-32) and the Harrison & Harrison instrument for Westminster Abbey, London (1937), showed that English organ building continued to progress with romantic persuasions, indicating little sign of continental intrusion or further development.

As a slight detour to the general trend at the time, but one which showed what was to follow, a small (and at the time insignificant instrument) was built by Hill, Norman and Beard in 1936, at a cost of £1037 for Lady Susi Jeans at Cleveland Lodge, Dorking (now home of The Royal School of Church Music).<sup>9</sup> The pipework for this instrument was made by the German firm of Eule and voiced on classical principles. This

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5 Bicknell, S., *Have we got it right? Organs and Organ Building in Britain Today*. No. 1 of 6 articles published in *Choir & Organ* in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'.  
[www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.1.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.1.htm) (accessed 04/12/2003), 2.

6 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*, 328.

7 *Ibid.*, 328 & 340.

8 Williams, P., *The Organ. The New Grove Musical Instrument Series*. 183.

9 Information supplied by Dr. John Henderson, Hon. Librarian for the RSCM in an email dated 15/10/2003.

instrument contains mechanical action throughout. Mechanical action was still a novelty during this period of British organ building, as the vast majority of actions were being constructed, or reconstructed, using pneumatics and, or, electricity. The Eule instrument (as it became known) was therefore something of a one off, but used regularly as a concert and continuo organ for the Box Hill Festivals organised by Lady Jeans. However, as Bicknell illustrates, when this instrument was built, it made no impression on the English organ builders:

Interesting though this organ was, it made no impression whatever on the English organ builders' belief in the quality and authority of their own way of doing things; such an instrument was fine as the domestic playing of a country lady, but surely had no relevance to the needs of worship in the Anglican Church.<sup>10</sup>

According to Richard Popplewell, the organ pleno of this small organ was 'sufficient to shatter anyone's ears'.<sup>11</sup> The instrument was restored in 1999-2000 by Harrison & Harrison and even today, according to Dr. J. Henderson at the RSCM, this instrument does not get used enough.<sup>12</sup>

The 1930s also saw the creation and appearance of the electronic organ. Interestingly, as early as 1891, Hope-Jones had predicted, at a lecture given to The College of Organists, that an organ without pipes would soon be developed, and indeed, during the 1930s, the organ world became distracted by such.<sup>13</sup> Upon arrival, the electronic organ threatened to take over from the traditional pipe organ, because of its space and money saving factor. Fortunately this did not happen because they proved to be less than satisfactory. They sounded so ghastly that nobody wanted to listen to, or play an electronic "comb and paper" effect in place of the real thing (if at all possible). Nevertheless, the period between the wars was littered with various experiments in

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10 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*, 329.

11 Derrett, P., 'Fifty Years Ago at the Royal Festival Hall'. Richard Popplewell talks to Paul Derrett. *Organists Review*, (Feb 2004), 36.

12 Information supplied by Dr. John Henderson, Hon. Librarian for the RSCM in an email dated 15/10/2003.

13 Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. 98.

electronic instruments.<sup>14</sup> Electronic organ building continues to this day, in which many monumental improvements have been made, as many of them now sound like a real pipe organ. It makes amusing reading scanning through the pages of *The Organ* and *The Musical Times* between 1930 and 1980 viewing the over-exaggerated advertisements for electronic organs, claiming them to be mistakable for the real thing. The study of the electronic organ and its effects on the musical world would make a fascinating study, but sadly, way beyond this work.

By the end of the 1930s, with all the distraction and propaganda created by the electronic organ, pipe organ building was stagnant. The First World War had slowed the progress down to snail's pace and with World War II looming, it ceased play altogether. The Second World War just magnified the misery and the factories of Willis and Hill, Norman & Beard were destroyed by bombs. By the time peace was declared, the future of organ building looked bleak, and for the next decade new instruments were rare. With the lack of new contracts there was little chance to build anything fresh, and the established firms had to survive by maintaining existing instruments by way of restoring actions and providing new consoles. Because of the economic difficulties facing the organ builders, and the general bent towards the Harrison & Harrison sound of circa 1910, which was cherished as the ideal, it was also difficult to make any tonal change.<sup>15</sup>

After the Second World War, the circulation of recorded performances of the organ music of J. S. Bach, performed on restored North German instruments, were beginning to be available in Britain. These continental instruments sounded very different to what had been thought the norm in Britain, particularly because Bach's organ music was most usually heard on a Hill, Willis, or Harrison & Harrison cathedral or concert instrument. The continental sound sparked a national debate. Kenyon's comments made about the period instrument revival can be related to the organ, and

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14 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 325.

15 Ibid., 333.

even though he does not directly mention the instrument, when reading his comments one would assume he has the organ in mind:

I think those of us who judged, sometimes fiercely, sometimes enthusiastically, the early products of the period-instrument revival on record and in concert did so on the basis of whether we liked the noise and not on whether the historical evidence used was plausible, sufficient, or correctly interpreted. Many critics and musicians hated the noise and said so..., but they too were involved in what one might call gut reactions. For some of us, there were many revelations to be had from the timbres, textures, and balances of these performances; we displayed an enthusiasm which perhaps helped to build up an unhealthy mystique surrounding the use of old instruments.<sup>16</sup>

During these early stages, the detail of voicing pipes came to the awareness of the British musical public. Much of the concern was about the tonality and the explosive and uneven attack when the notes start. This debate became concerned with the amount of nicking of the pipes. Nicking is a series of light cuts inserted by the voicer in the edge of the Languid and the lower lip of the pipe. The Languid is a plate which divides the body of a pipe from the foot.<sup>17</sup> The effect of the nicks is to steady the tone and control to a greater or lesser degree, the tendency of the pipe to chuff. According to Norman, no one knows when nicking was invented, but from surviving pipework it is presumed to go back to at least the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> A pipe without nicking will speak quickly and explosively with a spit before it settles down to the assigned note. Light nicking reduces this and heavier nicking slows the speech and is essential for pipes on high wind pressures.<sup>19</sup> With low wind pressures, flue pipes do not need their feet closed or mouths nicked to allow speech. The result can be a pleasant tone and a prompt attack, but is less than satisfactory for reeds as they need larger pressures of wind to retain their pitch. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wind pressures were increased to cope with the problems of reed speech, and it became apparent that the foot holes on flue pipes had to be narrowed to allow for their stable speech on a higher pressure. This introduced a new problem, as the flue pipes began to “spit” before settling down onto

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16 Kenyon, N., ‘Authenticity and Early Music. Some issues and questions’. 7.

17 Norman, J, *The Organs of Great Britain*. 131.

18 Ibid., 98.

19 Ibid., 99.



the desired note. This was the result of no nicking, and pipes were duly nicked to rectify the problem. However, in the formative years of the organ revival, it was believed that pipes in early instruments were very rarely nicked, even on higher wind pressures, and that this should be applied to new instruments.<sup>20</sup> This gave much cause for criticism to those who listened with bated breath:

The resulting spitting sound was renamed euphemistically as “chiff”, and was soon accepted as an authentic feature of the classical organ, and indeed came to be admired by some. It is true that, when listening to contrapuntal music in a resonant building, a mild degree of chiff can help to clarify the part writing. But in romantic music it sounds just like a fault, which indeed it is. An extreme case, when playing passages of rapid semi-quavers, can sound comically like an out-of-tune xylophone; each note consists entirely of chiff, with no time for the correct sound to begin.<sup>21</sup>

According to Bicknell, his travels to many unaltered historic instruments have convinced him that many of these instruments did not chiff very much, contrary to the argument about modifying the chiff on un-nicked pipes by controlling the attack on a good mechanical action.<sup>22</sup>

As with any new discovery, there was an overreaction in respect of nicking and it was not an aspect of voicing that was quick to gain a happy medium. Even today, some early neo-classical instruments suffer from too little nicking, if any at all.

In December 1952, Geraint Jones wrote the second of six articles entitled ‘Is the Organ a Musical Instrument?’ for *The Musical Times* series of articles under the general heading ‘Of Organs and Organists’, asking the question concerning the significance of the organ as a real musical instrument. He believes the English organ to be ‘medleys of sound’, often excellent in themselves, but not related to specific purposes. He describes the organ in The Royal Albert Hall, London as being an instrument excellent in solo registers, but unsuitable for the organ music of J. S. Bach because of the chorus

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20 Higher wind pressure implies 1½ inches up to 4 inches, as apposed to the wind pressures above 5 inches that were seen in great Victorian and Edwardian instruments.

21 Parr, H. C., *British Organs, Past Present and Future*. [www.c-parr.freereserve.co.uk/hcp/organs](http://www.c-parr.freereserve.co.uk/hcp/organs) (accessed 16/10/2003), 6-7.

22 Bicknell, S., *Is the future all mechanical? Organs and organ-building in Britain today*. No. 2 of 6 articles published in *Choir & Organ* in 1997 under the heading ‘Raising the Tone’. [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.2.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.2.htm) (accessed 04/12/2003), 2.

structure and the uneven balance between the pedal and manual flue choruses.<sup>23</sup> It is questionable why, when this organ is not a baroque instrument, should it be criticised, or worse still be changed to something it is not.<sup>24</sup> It was believed, by some, that regardless of the wonderful solo registers the romantic instrument possessed, they were inferior to an instrument with proper chorus structure with classically scaled pipework. Jones closes his article by asking organists and organ builders to accept the true organ:

Organists and organ-builders must cease to fool themselves, and, accepting the limitations inherent in the true organ style, must strive not for popularity...but the respect of the discerning music-lover, who as never before is coming to an appreciation of that period of music in which the organ claims instrumental pre-eminence.<sup>25</sup>

As is known, some organ builders in the earlier part of the twentieth century had wanted to experiment with building styles. However, because the romantic instrument was still leading the field, it would have been foolish for any organ builder to turn away business at times of financial struggle just because the requirements of the customer did not meet the personal tastes of the organ builder. The opportunity for organ builders to build instruments to their own ideals, and to house them in their workshop, was also limiting because of the expense. (Maurice Forsyth-Grant however, was to do this in the 1960s to great success.)<sup>26</sup> Therefore, however sensible Jones' closing statement may be, it would be fair to say that in the first half of the twentieth century the true organ for many a British resident would be the romantic instrument, and not the German baroque-styled instrument, as the vast majority of institutions that possessed an organ contained an instrument with romantic leanings.

In February 1953, Dr. Harold Darke wrote the fourth article for *The Musical Times* selection of articles under the general heading 'Of Organs and Organists' entitled 'In

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23 Jones, G., 'Is the Organ a Musical Instrument?'. The second of six essays entitled 'Of Organs and Organists'. *The Musical Times*, (Dec 1952), 543-4.

24 This instrument has just been restored to its original glory by Mander Ltd for a cost of 1.7 million pounds. The tonality of the organ has not been changed and a new rank of pipes has been added taking the total number of pipes to 9,999, making it the largest organ in Great Britain.

25 Jones, G., 'Is the Organ a Musical Instrument?'. 544.

26 Forsyth-Grant, M., *Twenty-One Years of Organ Building*. Oxford, Positif Press, 1987, 37.

Defence of Tradition'. He is very much against the dismissal of the English instrument and asked:

Do we really want to hear Bach played as if it were a museum piece on the same kind of organ Bach played on – or as they would like us to imagine he played on? Are we to ignore all the refinements of beauty of tone which have developed in organ-building during the centuries? Are we to play Bach without any emotion or expression, without any realisation of the beauty of the music? Such things they say are utterly unstylistic. 'We must realise the architecture of the whole, we must hear the contrapuntal parts.' So they do away with all the diapasons and add all the grotesque and whimsical stops they can find. Then they give us the bare bones of the notes with little (if any) variety of registration, phrasing or rhythmic freedom.<sup>27</sup>

Today, Darke's comments may appear amusing, however is there much truth in his statement. At the time Darke was writing, English organists had become very much accustomed to the 'over-refined' tones of the organ, and when such instruments started to become 'tonally challenged' in light of new discoveries being made it must have come as quite a shock. In support of the claims made by Darke, a Major J. E. Mee, a well travelled organist who was accustomed to playing German baroque organs, wrote a month later to the editor of *The Musical Times* commenting that:

I think that Dr. Darke is right to ask us if we really want Bach played only on instruments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (Curiously nobody seems to want to play Beethoven's sonatas on early nineteenth-century pianos.) Of course it is the music that is important; the vehicle is only a secondary consideration.<sup>28</sup>

However, Mee also acknowledged the merits of the German instrument and wrote:

I find practice on a baroque instrument salutary, to say the least, for these instruments force the player to register and play intelligently. He gets away with nothing. Everything is crystal clear, including pedal parts. One's weaknesses cannot be covered by 'woolly' pedal stops and closing the swell box over deficiencies in manual technique! In this sense a baroque organ is pitiless. I have come to the conclusion that whilst the baroque instrument *per se* is not the final answer to authoritative rendering of Bach, it does discipline the player so that he arrives at that desirable state when he instinctively uses his musical intelligence at any organ. I have found from constant practice, however, that for modern homophonic organ music the baroque instrument is not at all desirable; it is essentially an instrument for polyphony...

He then proceeds by commenting on two performances of Bach's Passacaglia in C minor played on a baroque organ by Professor Helmut Walcha, a Bach interpreter, and on Hereford Cathedral organ by Dr. Darke. Both performances, according to Major Mee, were valid and each offered their own interpretation to suit the appropriate

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27 Darke, H., 'In Defence of Tradition' The fourth of six essays entitled 'Of Organs and Organists. *The Musical Times*, (Feb 1953), 65.

28 Mee, J. E., 'Styles in Organ Playing. Letters to the Editor'. *The Musical Times*, (Apr 1953), 177.

instrument. 'There was one thing which both players had in common and which made both performances outstanding – each allowed Bach himself to tell the wondrous tale.'<sup>29</sup>

Sir George Dyson in his President's Address to The Royal College of Organists in July 1953 brought to attention the growing interest in the musical past and the desire to recreate it, not only by playing the correct notes, but also by performing it on the appropriate instruments. He acknowledged that this was very much the case with the advocates of the neo-classical organ, but also commented in support of the present day instrument saying:

...that men played on instruments now obsolete is true, and that they derived supreme imaginative and aesthetic satisfaction from them is also true. But to suggest that they did or would prefer them to a more modern substitute is quite meaningless. It is like saying that Bach preferred the stage coach to a motor car. He had no choice. He played on organs such as he found.<sup>30</sup>

Dyson asked for common sense to be employed at all times in relation to the primary role of the organ, whatever it may be, whether being for church use or recital purposes.<sup>31</sup>

Cecil Clutton, a keen advocate of the baroque organ, had been studying the work of Scandinavian and Dutch organ builders who were using principles employed by seventeenth and eighteenth century builders, such as mechanical action and low wind pressures. These instruments were a revelation to Clutton and he wrote articles praising such instruments. His articles were often met with hostility amongst readers, who believed he was criticising the home built product.<sup>32</sup> It was, however the work of Ralph Downes who became a key figure and the main influence on the organ's development in Britain. Downes, a professional musician, with much travelled knowledge of the organ, tells the reader that in 1925 when hearing William Minay play Bach's B Minor prelude, in a true style at Keble College Oxford, (that is without the tubas as Downes explains) it

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29 Ibid., 178.

30 Dyson, G., 'Church and Organ Music. Royal College of Organists. The President's Address'. *The Musical Times*, (Sep 1953), 414.

31 Ibid.

32 Bicknell. S., *The History of the English Organ*. 334.

'brought me abruptly to my senses.'<sup>33</sup> This experience, which Downes called "Orchestralised Bach", was the beginning of his quest to find an organ capable of doing justice to the organ music of Bach. (He could be called the English Schweitzer!) In 1928, Downes went to America to be the organist and director of music at Princeton University Chapel.<sup>34</sup> A new organ had just been completed by the Skinner Company with the influence of Willis trained G. Donald Harrison. Downes described his finding of the organ upon arrival as such:

As a 'paper specification' this seemed to have everything one could desire, excepting, perhaps, the large amount of borrowing of the stops in the pedal division: that was generally accepted as a necessary evil at the time. But when at last I arrived and actually tried it out, I was *bitterly* disappointed.<sup>35</sup>

Because of his dissatisfaction with the chapel organ, Downes began preliminary experiments with pipe scales and wind pressures, to varying degrees of success, on the instrument. However, his work at the university prevented him from getting his hands too dirty. In 1938 he returned to England to take up the post as organist and director of music at The London Oratory (Brompton), where he was to lead an active role in the installation of The Oratory's new Walker organ (which follows classical voicing principles in line with his research carried out to date).

In 1948, Downes was invited to draw up a specification for a new instrument to be erected in a new concert hall on London's South Bank (The Royal Festival Hall). This project was to be the turning point in Downes' career, which ignited a huge debate on organ design, dividing the English organ world in half. Downes was able to combine all his knowledge and practical experiences gained in organ design during his career, which spanned from playing at his local 'Super Cinema' in his youth;<sup>36</sup> his associations with T. C. Lewis instruments at Derby and Southwark;<sup>37</sup> discussions at Keble College Oxford;<sup>38</sup>

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33 Downes, R., *Baroque Tricks*. Adventures with the Organ Builders. 23.

34 Ibid., 25.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 18.

37 Ibid.

experimentations with pipework at Princeton University;<sup>39</sup> the influences of Louis Eugène-Rochesson<sup>40</sup> and subsequent visitations to French instruments; and the work carried out on the English instruments at The London Oratory and Buckfast Abbey.

Downes concocted numerous specifications for The Royal Festival Hall instrument, many of which were inspired by old instruments of the Netherlands and the work of Cavaillé-Coll in Paris.<sup>41</sup> He was also influenced by the new instruments of G. Donald Harrison, D. A. Flentrop, and was specifically inspired by the 1946 Marcussen organ in the Danish State Radio Concert Hall, Copenhagen.<sup>42</sup> Downes visited France to discuss his ideas for The Festival Hall with Rochesson, who was most supportive and agreed to voice the reeds. On return to England, Downes held many meetings with representatives of organ building firms, informing them of the situation and his requirements. As with any new venture, the reactions of the tenders were mixed, some were enthusiastic, some were amused, and others were hostile. The firm Harrison & Harrison of Durham were awarded the contract in 1949 and agreed to build the new instrument under the direction of Downes. (It is interesting that in the past, Downes had not liked the sound of Harrison & Harrison's instruments, but admired their attention to detail; this is what convinced him that they were right for the job.)<sup>43</sup>

Downes was certainly a man of great vision and conviction and it is known that this made him not the easiest of men to work for. Bicknell quotes from Mark Venning's 'Harrison's Great Adventures', written for the 23<sup>rd</sup> BIOS Journal in 1999, commenting about Downes' thoroughness and uncertainty:

On one occasion, after a particularly arduous spell of discussion had at least resolved certain delicate points apparently to everyone's satisfaction, Cuthbert Harrison was relieved to see

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38 Ibid., 23.

39 Ibid., 32.

40 Ibid., 46.

41 These specifications are listed in 'Baroque Tricks'.

42 Ibid., 82.

43 Ibid., 98.

Downes off from the Durham Station on the train to London. He then received a postcard from Darlington, only 20 miles down the line, overturning the decisions that had just been made.<sup>44</sup>

The cost of the instrument was equivalent to £5 million in today's money,<sup>45</sup> and considering Britain was in financial difficulty after the Second World War, it is not surprising to learn of the criticisms about the requirements of its designer. Downes was viewed very much as a god-like-figure, who had been given all necessary powers and monies to produce an instrument to his own ideals, and the reaction of the general public was interesting. Ralph Vaughan Williams in protest against the instrument wrote to *The Times* in 1951 remarking:

I admit that we have some bad organs in England, but at their worst they cannot surely make so nasty a noise as most of those on the Continent. As to the so-called 'Baroque' organ, which, I presume, I have heard at its best at the hands of the most distinguished performers, I can only compare it to a barrel organ in the street. This type of instrument is said to be right for playing Bach. For myself I want nothing better than Bach as played by Dr. Harold Darke on his typically English organ at St. Michael's Cornhill.<sup>46</sup>

This was the kind of criticism Downes would be subject, and to which he would have to battle against for the succeeding years. Geoffrey Williams in 1953, wrote to the Editor of *The Musical Times* asking 'can the pretty rustic pipings of the baroque instrument ever adequately replace the grandeur of, say, the Toccata in F rolling round a vast cathedral from some noble old Willis or Walker?'<sup>47</sup> Here again it is evident that the appreciation and love for the romantic instrument, which had made a name and secured a firm place in the hearts of the British, is far from being extinguished. Williams continues his article by expressing doubt regarding the organ for The Royal Festival Hall and adds another entry to Ralph Downes' book of insults. 'It is not reassuring to learn that a real high-priest (both in theory *and* practice) of the baroque cult has been entrusted with the designing of the permanent organ for The Royal Festival Hall.'<sup>48</sup>

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44 Bicknell, S., 'Fifty Years On. Stephen Bicknell assess the organ in London's Royal Festival Hall half a century after it was completed'. *Choir & Organ*, (Jan/Feb 2004), 29.

45 Ibid., 26.

46 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 336.

47 Williams, G. R., 'Styles in Organ Playing. Letters to the Editor'. *The Musical Times*, (Apr 1953), 178.

48 Ibid.

Williams believed that this instrument would be used more in orchestral and choral works and concludes by saying:

...and the mere thought of our 'baroque' instrument in such works as the third symphony of Saint-Saens, the fourth of Bax, Kodály's *Te Deum* or *Psalmus Hungaricus*, Schmitts's *Psalm 47* or Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, not to mention such organ concertos as those of Dupré, Sowerby, etc., is too comic to be entertained.<sup>49</sup>

However, Downes did not surrender and the organ was completed in 1954. Bicknell reports that 'the result horrified those who were so disposed, delighted many more, and astonished almost everyone.'<sup>50</sup>

Upon its completion, many people believed the instrument to be a baroque organ. Nevertheless, Susi Jeans, in her essay entitled 'Baroque Organ Problems in England' states otherwise:

The Royal Festival Hall organ is not a baroque organ and was never intended to be one. The designer set out to produce an instrument on which the music of J. S. Bach could be played as well as that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and one which would also be suitable for accompanying choral singing. The instrument therefore possesses both baroque and romantic elements.<sup>51</sup>

In the first stages of design, The Royal Festival Hall organ was described by Downes as 'a sizable 4-manual organ of an eclectic classical design', but as time elapsed he changed his views and in the final stages of forming the specification, Downes scrapped the romantic solo division and replaced it with a fifth division of principal character.<sup>52</sup> Downes acknowledged that this happened because of 'official opposition' to the fact that the organ would be unsuitable for choral accompaniment and orchestral backing with the lack of modern diapason stops and high pressure reeds, and in defence wrote that 'if the organ would at some time have to accompany massed singing, there *could* be some measure of doubt of its tonal adequacy.'<sup>53</sup> Therefore, in Downes' opinion, the organ escaped its eclectic nature and became 'an integrated whole.'<sup>54</sup>

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49 Ibid.

50 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*, 336.

51 Jeans, S., 'Baroque Organ Problems in England'. *The Musical Times*, (Apr 1954), 183.

52 See proposed specification for this division on page 122 of *Baroque Tricks*.

53 Downes, R., *Baroque Tricks*. Adventures with the Organ Builders. 79.

54 Ibid.



However, the complaints about the instrument and its designer did not cease, and a Mr. H. H. Bowman wrote to *The Musical Times* a month after Susi Jeans' essay on Baroque Organ Problems arguing that 'England possesses countless fine instruments on which organ music of all periods can be played to perfection.'<sup>55</sup> At the beginning of his article the reader is lulled into believing that Bowman is quite in favour of the baroque organ as he believed it would have been far better if The Festival Hall Organ had been a baroque organ because 'it is neither one thing nor the other, but a hybrid instrument possessing in any degree of loudness from *forte* to full organ, an intolerably coarse, harsh and strident tone.'<sup>56</sup> Yet, his closing sentence, again, demonstrates the Englishman's preference to the romantic instrument; 'Why should we change our splendid organs for such an instrument as that in the Royal Festival Hall, which is certainly not to the taste of the vast majority.'<sup>57</sup> Surely, Bowman would have known that no instrument, in this instance, was being changed, but a new one built as an addition to the organs of Britain. It may be fair to declare that no other organ in Britain has had such an impact on the musical public (at least since the instrument built by Henry Willis for the Great Exhibition of 1851).

Despite the criticisms of Downes and his new instrument, Bicknell quotes Sir Thomas Beecham's favourable comment towards The Royal Festival Hall instrument, which he takes from Laurence Elvin's book *The Harrison Story*: 'A magnificent instrument...people who have written contrary are jackasses; it is one of the best organs in the world. It only requires someone to play it who knows the instrument.'<sup>58</sup>

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55 Bowman. H. H., 'The Festival Hall and the Baroque Organ. Letters to the Editor'. *The Musical Times*, (May 1954), 265.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 337.

At the time of its installation, The Royal Festival Hall organ and the attention Downes paid to the detail of pipe scales, voicings, and winding, established a model that other British organ builders would follow and try to better:

Since the advent of the organ in the Royal Festival Hall in 1954 numerous organs have been built in Britain to a greater or lesser degree inspired by European baroque organs of the past and by the Organ Reform Movement.<sup>59</sup>

The wheels were now enthusiastically rolling and the next thirty years saw many new instruments built in line with the historic principles set out by the organ reform movement, and the work of Ralph Downes. Many ideas that had matured over the preceding hundred years were either thrown out or reconstructed along with instruments that embodied them.

#### The Royal Festival Hall Organ fifty years on

Fifty years on, there is a greater understanding and appreciation of the instrument for what it is, and what it has done for the development of the organ in Great Britain. Opinions are less divided about its success or otherwise, and in 2000 under the heading 'A Concert Goer's Guide to the Organ' Bicknell wrote in support of the instrument's success saying that 'the organ at the Royal Festival Hall, completed in 1954 is an individual creation of its designer Ralph Downes and its builders Harrison & Harrison Ltd of Durham.'<sup>60</sup> Mark Venning, the present director of Harrison & Harrison, has also written in support of the instrument's success saying that:

It was designed as a well-balanced classical instrument embracing a number of rich and varied ensembles which alone or in combination could equal the dynamic scale of any orchestra or choral grouping in addition to coping with the entire solo repertoire.<sup>61</sup>

and in the editorial to the April 2004 edition of the BIOS Reporter, John Hughes wrote:

The organ not only worked as a musical instrument, but its success brought it an almost iconic status...The RFH organ undoubtedly propelled the organ recital into the public consciousness...attracting the audiences it had enjoyed in the heyday of the great Victorian

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59 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1*. 14.

60 Bicknell, S., *A Concert Goer's Guide to the Organ 2000*. [www.rfh.org.uk](http://www.rfh.org.uk) (accessed 06/01/2004).

61 Venning, M., *The Royal Festival Hall Organ. A Note on the Recent Work 2000*. [www.rfh.org.uk](http://www.rfh.org.uk) (accessed 06/01/2004).

concert organs, and the performers acquired a new esteem and public appreciation...the instruments first fifty years have undoubtedly established the organ as a major influence on organ design and performance, even if one were to wish that the process had come from a different direction.<sup>62</sup>

No doubt about it, the instrument has had a rough ride. The dry acoustic of The Royal Festival Hall has also done little in making the journey any easier. William McVicker, the present curator of the organ, wrote in the April 2004 BIOS Reporter, saying that:

The RFH was designed to have a clear, dry acoustic. A recent study showed that Hope Bagenal, the RFH's acoustician, used inaccurate absorption coefficients in his calculations when working out the proposed reverberation time for the new hall. This and the difficulties of finding high-quality construction materials in post war Britain, resulted in the acoustic of the building being much drier than was expected.<sup>63</sup>

McVicker continues by commenting on the fact that the telling acoustic of The Royal Festival Hall has not altogether been counter-productive, as it has contributed to better standards in orchestral playing, and that the lack of reverberation has shown-up tuning and ensemble difficulties, which have not always been evident in more reverberant buildings. The same, according to McVicker, must be applied to the standard of organ-playing, and he comments on reviews of the 1950s revealing some of the better known recitalists struggling with the lack of reverberation.<sup>64</sup>

In the February 2004 edition of *Organists Review*, Richard Popplewell talks to Paul Derrett about his experiences playing the instrument, commenting that:

The RFH organ was a real triumph for Downes, for Harrison's', (who were clearly very scared of this dramatic departure from their usual style) and for the cause of organ music in this country generally...I got to know the organ pretty well over the succeeding years...However many times I played the instrument I somehow felt I couldn't risk developing my registration in the mood of the occasion – as one usually does. It seemed wise to play safe and stick with one's pre-concert preparations and not deviate from them. I wonder if others felt the same?<sup>65</sup>

At the end of 2005, The Royal Festival Hall will close for refurbishment and re-open in 2007. During which the organ will be removed, restored, and some divisions resited. Whilst the organ is away, the acoustics of the Hall will be improved, the stage

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62 Hughes, J., 'Editorial'. *BIOS Reporter*, XXVIII/2, (Apr 2004), 3.

63 McVicker, W., 'Future Plans At The Royal Festival Hall'. *BIOS Reporter*, XXVIII/2, (Apr 2004), 9.

64 Ibid.

65 Derrett, P., 'Fifty Years Ago at the Royal Festival Hall. Richard Popplewell talks to Paul Derrett'. *Organists Review*, (Feb 2004), 36.

enlarged, and the furnishings modernised. McVicker outlines the work to be done in detail in his article for BIOS, and below is an extract of the proposed works

Tonally there will be no changes to the organ...The organ chamber will be made more reflective; the plans provide for a more effective reflector...The work to the organ is designed to allow the instrument to be re-positioned in a smaller chamber, undertaking a minimum of alteration to the organ's mechanism and retaining the organ's tonal character, whilst allowing the chamber to absorb less sound and reflect more. When the RFH's acoustic has been remodelled and the organ re-installed, the pipework will be re-balanced to take into account the acoustic changes in the building.<sup>66</sup>

Organists will have to sit patiently for the next three years whilst the organ and hall undergo restoration, but what is certain, is, that once the organ is reinstalled, the sound of the instrument will become headline news in every organistic journal and association.

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66 McVicker. W., 'Future Plans At The Royal Festival Hall'. 13.

## Chapter Five

### The British organ after the completion of The Royal Festival Hall instrument

The organ in The Royal Festival Hall, which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year (2004), has recently been described as the most important and interesting instrument built in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century:

Its importance lies partly in the fact that it was the first neo-classical organ of any significance in the British Isle far outstripping any previous halting experiments in its total commitment to a new and culturally informed way of thinking. In addition, it is the most important and interesting organ of any kind built in Britain in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup>

One criticism of the instrument was its electro-pneumatic key and stop action. However, this was seen as a starting point, and from 1954 onwards it was idealised to build classically voiced organs, in line with the sound of The Festival Hall instrument, with mechanical action as the only acceptable form of action. Swell boxes were to be spared, there was to be no orchestral effects and no gadgetry, which included pistons. Parr states, 'those who designed and advocated these instruments were hard taskmasters.'<sup>2</sup>

The benefits of mechanical key action were being rediscovered by scholars studying European instruments, and their research found that (a sensitive) mechanical key action was more sophisticated than any other form of action. According to Bicknell, the link between the classical organ and mechanical action was clear enough to anyone who had visited organs on the continent by Marcussen,<sup>3</sup> Flentrop, and Frobenius.<sup>4</sup> The research carried out by scholars and organ builders, and their now open-mindedness and

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1 Bicknell, S., 'Fifty Years On. Stephen Bicknell assesses the organ in London's Royal Festival Hall half a century after it was completed'. *Choir & Organ*, (Jan/Feb 2004), 29.

2 Parr, H., *British Organs, Past, Present and Future*. [www.c-parr.freemove.co.uk/hcp/organs.htm](http://www.c-parr.freemove.co.uk/hcp/organs.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 5.

3 It is worth pointing out that the Marcussen organ in St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham (1973) has a poor mechanical action and in 1993 the *swell to great* coupling action had to be rebuilt. The swell action is described as "old fashioned" by the present organist. When a visitation was made to the said instrument on 10/01/04, the *swell to great* coupler was still not working well and was causing notes on the swell to jamb whilst playing.

4 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 341.

willingness to travel, has enabled the development of a very light, and precise, touch for mechanical action by the use of carefully designed pallets and the employment of low wind pressures.<sup>5</sup> Parr commends mechanical action because of its natural top resistance that leads to cleaner and more precise playing.<sup>6</sup> Paul Hale, the editor of *Organists Review*, acknowledged in 2002 that great progress had been made over the last fifty years in Great Britain and Europe with the reintroduction of mechanical action as the norm for most new instruments. He also commented that mechanical action has greatly improved the playing in terms of musicianship and stylistic awareness over the last generation of players.<sup>7</sup>

It is alleged by Bicknell and others that mechanical action is the most reliable and enduring action of all kinds:

Another influential argument was longevity: the many organs surviving from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided long-term durability of a simple mechanical action. Any mechanism incorporating pneumatics needed complete and thorough renewal every thirty to fifty years.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not Bicknell's statement is true will be examined in the next chapter. However, with most things, if all efforts have been concentrated on one aspect, (in this case the key action), other aspects can suffer. In the case of the classical organ, the sound suffered, as voicing was compromised. Bicknell comments that 'some of them, indeed, came across with all the brash, hard intrusiveness of a concrete slab.'<sup>9</sup> Because more emphasis was placed upon instrument design, specifically the question of key action to combat the inadequacies inherent with pneumatic and electric action, rather than tonal quality, instruments lost sight of some, if not much, of their musical qualities

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5 This was particularly noticeable when playing on the two manual Walker organ (1988) in Oriel College Oxford on 17/02/04 and the four manual Walker organ (1984) in Bolton Town Hall on 26/02/04.

6 Parr, H., *British Organs, Past, Present and Future*. 7.

7 Hale, P., 'A Stick too far?' *Organists Review*, (May 2002), 104.

8 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 341.

9 Bicknell, S., 'The Artistic Revival. Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. No. 6 of 6 articles published in *Choir & Organ* in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'

[www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.6.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.6.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 1. and 'Baby or Bathwater? Organs and organ-building in Britain today.' No. 5 of 6 articles [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.5.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.5.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 2.

initially intended. 'The Organ reform movement tended to play down the need for beauty of voicing, regarding the whole subject as tainted with romanticism and therefore decadent.'<sup>10</sup> Andrew Williams would agree with such, and wrote in 1967 saying that 'mechanical action in an organ must be established as the first priority before any features of tonal design are considered.'<sup>11</sup>

Although a number of small neo-classical instruments were built in Britain between 1954 and 1965, it was not until the arrival of the Frobenius organ for The Queen's College Chapel at Oxford in 1965, that people began to take a closer interest in the classical organ. This instrument became a landmark for many organ spotters in Great Britain, even though it was not homegrown.<sup>12</sup> The instrument has been constructed in a most thorough and precise manner, employing the finest of materials available; the casework is reported to have cost a quarter of the total price of the instrument.<sup>13</sup> At the time of its installation, the English organ builders thought they could not match such an instrument because of its vast cost, and also because they were still experiencing financial difficulties due to the aftermath of the Second World War. More importantly though was that Frobenius had over forty years of experience building classical instruments with mechanical action, and the British saw they had much catching up to do. During the early post World War II years, the British organ builders had the reputation for producing fine sounding instruments (when given the chance), but their workmanship left much to be desired; often second-hand materials were included to

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10 Bicknell, S. 'Bach or Bauhaus?' Organs and organ-building in Britain today. No. 4 of 6 articles [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.4.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.4.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 3.

11 Rowntree and Brennan. *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume. 1*. 11. – quote taken from A. H. Williams – The New Organ – St. Faith's Parish Church, Shellingford.

12 It is worth noting that to have a true classical organ revival in England would be somewhat different to as it has turned out. The generalised term "organ revival in Great Britain" implies reviving the organ suitable to play Bach's works, but because this had never been possible in Britain before the mid twentieth century, then a true classical organ revival in the British sense would be a return to the pedal-less instruments of pre 1830, and not of the continental type. The 'Bach organ' was foreign to this country, even though it can be misinterpreted as been here in the past because of the German key system adopted in the mid 1800 which enabled organists play all the notes Bach wrote.

13 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 344.

save money, such as second-hand pipework (Tewkesbury Abbey, 1947) and soundboards (The London Oratory, 1953).<sup>14</sup>

The Queen's College instrument lacks all forms of gadgetry and was the first instrument in Britain, of significant size, to be installed following the tenets of the organ reform movement in almost every particular.<sup>15</sup> This new instrument replaced a three manual instrument of a chequered history, which was reported to have, at one time, been the fifth largest instrument in England.<sup>16</sup> The Frobenius instrument, therefore, caused much shock.<sup>17</sup> The instrument is completely mechanical in both key and stop action and based upon the North German Werkprinzip design with each division having evenly balanced choruses.<sup>18</sup> The tonal appointment of this instrument seems to have very little relation to the accompaniment of a choral service, which, as Bicknell says, is often stated to be the prime function of an English organ.<sup>19</sup> However, as Pacey and Popkin state in their organography of Oxford 'it would be difficult to overpraise the quality of this instrument or to exaggerate the influence that it has had on organ-building in the United Kingdom.'<sup>20</sup>

A recent visitation to play this organ confirmed that it indeed has a fine mechanical action (if a little noisy), with a very crisp, and clear attack requiring the minimal amount of physical effort to command even when all the stops are drawn. The general acoustics of The Queen's Chapel did much to complement the instrument, although personally, it was felt that the individual registers did not have as much excitement as full organ. To be fair, there was no opportunity on this visit to witness the organ away from the cockpit, however, the present organ scholar at The Queen's

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14 Bicknell, S., 'Bach or Bauhaus?' 3.

15 Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. 270.

16 Pacey, R. & Popkin, M., *The Organs of Oxford*. Oxford, Postif Press, 1997, 80.

17 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*, 342.

18 The great is based on an 8ft' principal, the brustpositiv a 4ft' principal and the pedal a 16ft' principal, (even though it is actually a stopped wood subbass because of height restrictions.

19 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 344.

20 Pacey, R. & Popkin, M., *The Organs of Oxford*. 79.



College commented that there was a ‘beauty of tone for each and every stop’ and that ‘these are also extremely complimentary when used in a variety of combinations across all registers.’<sup>21</sup> The late Nicholas Danby, in an interview in 1997, expressed that ‘the Frobenius at Queen’s is one of the finest, and probably one of their best organs anywhere’<sup>22</sup> and Rowntree and Brennan support the success of the instrument by stating that it is ‘an instrument which may perhaps have been equalled, but which has certainly not yet been surpassed.’<sup>23</sup>

In a recent correspondence with The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Stoke D’Abernon, Surrey, which contains a two manual and pedal organ built by Frobenius in 1975, (inspired by the organ at The Queen’s College Oxford<sup>24</sup>) it was made known, and quote ‘this instrument [Stoke D’Abernon] was considered by Mr Frobenius himself to be the finest he had built up to that time’.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to learn of these views, as it implies that the instrument at Stoke D’Abernon outshines The Queen’s College instrument in its maker’s opinion. Also interestingly is that this claim is not cited in any of the published texts witnessed so far.<sup>26</sup>

The instrument at The Queen’s College has one little quirk concerning the draw-stop layout on the console. As is the custom practice in most traditional console designs, divisions of drawstops are either placed on the right or left hand side of the manuals, for example the great and choir/positiv on the right, and the swell and pedal on the left (unlike Hexham Abbey which has the great on the left hand jamb and the swell on the right hand jamb).<sup>27</sup> On first glance at the console the stop layout looks no different to any other two manual instrument (there are no departmental labels, but this is a common

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21 Questionnaire response reply from the present organ scholar at Queen’s College Oxford, (Feb 2004).

22 Ibid.

23 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1*. 16.

24 The consultants, incidentally, for this instrument at Stoke D’Abernon were Dame Gillian Weir, Lady Susi Jeans, and James Dalton who were all connect in some way to The Queen’s College organ.

25 Letter and reply questionnaire received from Peter Wells, Verger of St Mary’s Stoke D’Abernon (26/01/04).

26 Regrettably, I have not had the opportunity to visit this instrument to date of publication.

27 Personal visitation to play this instrument on 25/10/03.

occurrence in many instruments), however, upon closer inspection, the stops for all three divisions are on both sides of the manuals. The rows of draw-stops on the jambs are in two rows (as standard), but the top four stops on the left hand jamb are for the brustpositiv: 8ft', 4ft', 4ft', 2ft'; below that are four stops for the great: 16ft', 8ft', 8ft', 4ft'; and below that are the four stops for the pedal: 16ft', 8ft', 8ft', 4ft'. On the right hand jamb, the trend continues with the top four stops being the brustpositiv, the middle four the great, and the bottom three the pedal. The three couplers are in the position where one would expect to find composition pedals. On closer inspection, each draw-stop is engraved over the nomenclature with either a small letter G (*Great*), B (*Brustpositiv*), or P (*Pedal*) to inform the player which division each drawstop belongs to. This eccentric way to group the draw-stops is most certainly not ideal, but one would, no doubt, become more familiar with such a scheme if presented with it on a more permanent basis. The reason for this layout is not known, nor is whether Frobenius applied the same theory to his organ at Stoke D'Abernon. Nevertheless, from careful study of a photograph of the Stoke instrument,<sup>28</sup> and an intelligent guess, one can deduce that the console layout looks very similar to that at Queen's College.

When playing Queen's College organ, it was apparent that the reeds were not one of the instruments greatest features; they were rather coarse, specifically noticeable in the brustpositiv cromorne 8ft' and the pedal fagot 16ft'. The pedal reed is very weighty and borders on the uncouth overpowering the instrument (that is from the console). The great trumpet is acceptable. In support of this personal view, John Norman has written that the reeds are not one of its greatest strengths, saying that 'if one had to criticise the instrument, it can only be on the grounds that the more recent instruments by Frobenius have better reeds and are perhaps less weighty in the pedal.'<sup>29</sup> A present organ scholar at Keble College Oxford, described the cromorne 8ft' at The Queen's College as sounding

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28 See Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 2*. 138

29 Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. 270.

‘like a wasp trying to escape from a nest.’<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, further discussions with some of the Oxford organ scholars confirmed that despite the reeds, the remainder of the instrument is very fine, if not rather over-rated. ‘The influence of this organ has been felt since by the many organ scholars in Oxford and the many visitors to Queen’s.’<sup>31</sup>

The point was also made by the present organ scholars, whom questioned on the visit, that the instrument is unsuitable for romantic repertoire.<sup>32</sup> The organ scholar at Queen’s College wrote that ‘its only downfall is that it doesn’t work for any late romantic/symphonic organ music.’<sup>33</sup> This type of comment became a recurring criticism of the many neo-classical organs in Britain, and is perhaps to be expected considering much of the romantic organ repertoire written and performed before the 1950s is still played. In the next chapter, this concern shall be addressed, as it has been raised by many organists in response to the results of a specifically drawn questionnaire sent out across Great Britain to institutions containing neo-classical instruments.

By the 1970s, the neo-classical organ was making its presence well and truly felt and to acknowledge such presence enthusiastic organ historians John Rowntree and John Brennan produced the first of the three books entitled ‘The Classical Organ in Britain’ in 1975. These books catalogued all the new classical organs built in Great Britain between 1955 and 1990 containing mechanical key action. James Dalton, the driving force behind The Queen’s College organ, wrote the Foreword to the first volume, and it is to this point we now turn.

### The inclusion or exclusion of the swell box

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30 Personal discussions with the junior organ scholar at Keble College Oxford, (17/02/04).

31 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *Volume 1*. 16.

32 It was also commented upon that such was the case with most of the neo-classical instruments in the Oxford University chapels.

33 Questionnaire response reply from the present organ scholar at Queen’s College Oxford, (Feb 2004).

The attitude, that an organ must have two manuals and pedals and include a swell box to rate the status of being a respectable instrument (a remarkably prevalent view, particular in country parishes, where it is least appropriate), has been repeatedly shown to be unjustified.<sup>34</sup>

This view, in fact has actually been shown to be justified as shall be seen below when discussing the requirements of organists. The Queen's College organ contains a brustpositiv enclosed in a swell box. Whether Dalton was overruled on such a matter in the design process is not known. However, if working with the assumption that he was not, and the premise that the instrument is trying to copy the Werkprinzip design, it was therefore, surely, not appropriate to include a division enclosed in a swell box. Not to mention, if we also assume that Dalton's comment about 'country parishes' is implying small churches, then The Queen's College Chapel is not a vast building and should not need a swell box. If the liturgical requirements put upon this organ were put aside, then the type of repertoire intended to be played would not require a swell box.

According to Baker, the swell box was a Spanish invention of the early eighteenth century and not English as had once been thought.<sup>35</sup> The Spanish organ is characterised by its reeds, and when reeds are placed inside a box under expression, their sound is benefited greater than a flute or diapason. Therefore, enclosed reeds became very popular in Spain. In 1703, Faustino Carvalho enclosed the third manual of the organ in Seville Cathedral Spain.<sup>36</sup> It is learnt from Norman that it was the English organ builder, Abraham Jordan, who introduced the swell box to England after seeing one in Portugal. As a sideline, Jordan imported sherry from Portugal, and it is here that he discovered Carvalho's swell box, with its eighteen ranks of pipes enclosed in a box that could be operated by a lever connected to the console. When Jordan added a swell box to the organ he built for the church of St. Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge in 1712 with one department 'adapted to the art of emitting sounds by swelling the notes', he claimed the

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34 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1*. 8.

35 Baker, D., *The Organ*. Shire Publications, Ltd., 1991, 35.

36 Sumner, W. L., *The Organ; Its Evolution, Principles of Construction and Use*. 95.

idea his own, and made no reference to the Spanish instruments.<sup>37</sup> Sumner tells of the proposed inclusion of a swell section for the organ in St. Paul's Cathedral in 1712:

It will be recalled that in Harris's proposal of 1712 for a west end organ for St. Paul's Cathedral one of the six manuals of this instrument was "to be adapted for the emitting off sounds to express Passion by swelling any Note, as if inspir'd by Human Breath; which is the greatest Improvement an Organ is capable of, except in articulation". In the same pamphlet, he claims to have introduced this feature into the organ he set up at Salisbury Cathedral in 1710, and to have shown it "five years since" to Mr. Phillip Hart, a well-known London organist. There is no record that Harris actually fulfilled his claims before Abraham Jordan, father and son made a small swell organ for their instrument at St. Magnus's Church, London Bridge.<sup>38</sup>

Upon its introduction to England, the swell division was very small, containing only a few stops and a short compass. Nevertheless, its presence was noticed, and during the succeeding centuries the swell division blossomed to form a vital part of the British organ heritage, and is seen by many organists of professional and amateur persuasion to be a vital part of the instrument. It could be said that the swell division is one of the most important developments to the organ the British made, even if they did steal the original idea:

Jordan made a sliding shutter to the front of the box and this could be opened or closed by means of a pedal. The device found immediate favour in England and before the more modern Venetian swell fronts were invented the lid of the box was hinged and worked by ropes, as an alternative to Jordan's method.<sup>39</sup>

From circa 1712, the swell box has been included in almost every British instrument and many French, American, and even German romantic instruments. It was the work of Cavaillé-Coll and Father Willis who developed the full swell effect in the mid nineteenth century, and Willis became world famous for his "full English swell" (based on 16ft', 8ft' and 4ft' reeds with mixtures) which is still highly treasured today.

When appraising the organ in St. Oswald's Church Durham, Simon Fitzgerald, draws the reader's attention to the fact that some neo-classical organs do not even sound good when enclosed in a swell box, specifically if the voicing is poor:

The classic Full Swell with reeds and upperwork is one of the finest sounds an organ can produce, especially when thinking of the numerous Willis examples left to us. Here [St.

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<sup>37</sup> Norman, J., *The Organs of Britain*. 76-7.

<sup>38</sup> Sumner, W. L., *The Organ*. 182.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Oswald's] the result is less than satisfying – a strident mixture, scratchy unison and buzzing sub-unison are not the best of partners!<sup>40</sup>

Organists often consider, and discuss the possibility that if the Germans had adopted the swell box, (sooner than in their large late nineteenth-century romantic instruments) would Bach himself have made use of such a device, and indicated it in his music? Alternatively, would he have left it alone and, or, left its operation to the discretion of the performer as he is reputed to have done in respect of registration? Interestingly, Sumner states that 'the neglect of this device by the Germans was far less serious to the art of organ playing than the British neglect of the pedal organ and its possibilities.'<sup>41</sup>

Some of the classical organ advocates campaigned for the removal, or exclusion, of the swell box. They believed there to be no place for them in real organ music in spite of the romantic repertoire and liturgical needs. It is accepted that swell boxes with their balanced shutters were, and still are, expensive objects. In post-war Britain, the financial struggle meant the amount of good quality wood required to build such a device (and the mechanism to operate it) was seen as an unnecessary expense when you could get two or three extra ranks of pipes in lieu. The church of St. Martin in Hull is an example and the Revd. G. Hunter (a keen classical advocate) wrote an article about this instrument in *The Organ* in October 1967 commenting that:

The most surprising thing is the omission of a swell box. We judged 14 stops without a swell a "better buy" than 12 with swell...and if in service music a gedackt is too loud surely the next best stop is the niente. (We seem to have developed a phobia of short silences, and have an obsession of filling them with wisps of echo gamba.) The only swell organ effect noticeably missed is the chorus reeds, which in any case could not be expected in so small an organ as this.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Fitzgerald, S., *St. Oswald's Church Durham. Pipe Organs of Durham and the North East.* [www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.hirdneworgans/oswalds.htm](http://www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.hirdneworgans/oswalds.htm) (accessed 20/10/03).

41 Sumner, W. L., *The Organ*. 95.

42 Reproduced in Forsyth-Grant, M., *Twenty One Years of Organ Building*. 114-5

The view expressed by the Reverend Hunter is a valid argument against the enclosed swell division in favour of more pipes<sup>43</sup>, and in 1974, the Revd. J. L. Birley wrote to *The Organ* describing the new Grant Degens & Bradbeer organ in St. Peter's Church, Dunchurch near Rugby, again supporting the swell-less organ, but giving the impression he is highly defensive towards the instrument:

For the organist, hide bound and attached all too firmly to his soft swell celests, this Brustwerk will seem to offer little consolation, but for the musician of perception it will be a fount of refreshment... This organ is truly a delight, not to be missed by anyone who values real organ sound.<sup>44</sup>

In recent correspondence with the present organist at St. Peter's Church, Dunchurch, he wrote saying that weaknesses in the organ are that 'It has no string sounds and no swell pedals', and also comments that 'it is a two manual instrument producing an unusual combination of sound.'<sup>45</sup> Whether or not the present organist at St. Peter's has examined Revd. Birley's article is unknown, however, it illustrates that

- a) Revd. Birley would not consider the present organist a musician of perception or someone who values real organ sound. or
- b) The organ is possibly not "truly a delight".

In support for the swell box, the organist of St. Catherine's Barmby Moor, York commented that a weakness in their instrument was a 'lack of any part under expression, lack of true pianissimo',<sup>46</sup> and the organist at The Church of The Holy Cross, Fenham, near Newcastle-Upon-Tyne commented that their organ had 'no swell pedal', which implies no swell box.<sup>47</sup>

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43 Throughout July and August 2004, I 'filled in' for the organist of St. Ignatius Church, Hendon in Sunderland. It was made known to me on my first Sunday that the improvisations I played during communion (mostly with the choir and swell boxes shut) were very well received as their resident organist will not do this. Parishioners, including the Priest, commented that they find the silences awkward and very much enjoyed and appreciated having the music to enhance the moments of prayer and contemplation. This is opposite to the impressions given in Revd. Hunter's article.

44 Birley, J. L., 'The New Organ in St. Peter's Church, Dunchurch, Nr, Rugby'. *The Organ*, (1974), 28.

45 Questionnaire correspondence with the present organist of St. Peter's, Dunchurch, (Feb 2004).

46 Questionnaire correspondence with the present organist of St. Catherine's Barmby Moor, North Yorkshire, (Feb 2004).

47 Recent questionnaire correspondence with the present organist of Holy Cross, Fenham, (Feb 2004).

The swell box has its place in both a liturgical sense as well in much romantic and modern repertoire. To be able to enhance a church service by the use of sensitive swell-expression, in either improvisations or selected voluntaries (before, and or, during a service) can transform worshipers into a more spiritual mind, regardless to the fact that it is an artificial crescendo (in the sense that the pipes do not get louder or softer). John Speller comments that:

Although much organ music can be played without a swellbox, a department under expression is, in my opinion, invaluable for matching the intensity of tone to the singing of choir or congregation in liturgical accompaniment, and to omit the swell organ is false economy.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the smaller one and two manual instruments illustrated in volumes one and two of Rowntree and Brennan do not contain swell boxes. In theory this is all well and good when trying to perform early organ music in its original context, however, when an organ contains only 10 stops, all unenclosed and the softest register being an 8ft' stopped diapason, any subtle expression could prove difficult, especially when used for other repertoires, as is likely to happen. A small church organ will require a strident tone, and there will be little or no room for soft subtle voicings. Therefore, referring back to Dalton's comment concerning the country parishes and small instruments, one would surely find a swell box at its most valuable. Dr. J. Inglis, organist of St. Michael's Church, Coxwold, North Yorkshire commented that:

Unsuitable repertoire or accompaniment can occasionally be requested (weddings and funerals, mainly), but this would be true of any 9 stop organ - in relation to such requests, the major disadvantage is absence of a swell box...<sup>49</sup>

From Volume 3 of Rowntree and Brennan it is seen that the vast majority of instruments with two or more manuals and pedals built after 1979 for churches contain a swell box. It is evident that in hindsight swell boxes were, and are, valuable assets to an organ. Some neo-classical instruments have a compromise to the Venetian shutter mechanism that is traditional with the English swell box design. Divisions, namely

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48 Speller, J., 'Within a Dozen Stops'. *The Organ*, (1976), 183.

49 Correspondence with Dr. J. Inglis, Organist at Coxwold, North Yorkshire, (Mar 2004).



positivs or brustwerks are enclosed in a box with doors on the front which can allow a *pp* or *ff*. The construction of this expression box is of interest and an example is the two manual Marcussen organ at St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham. The brustwerk for this particular instrument has sliding doors in place of louvers. These doors are operated by a balanced pedal, and open and close according to the pressure exerted on the pedal (no different to opening a normal swell box). However, at the console this device allows either a pleasant *pp* or an ear splittingly painful *ffff*. Once the doors are opened slightly, because of their size, all the sound is emitted. One has to be very careful when operating this swell box, because as discovered, a rapid push of the pedal and the doors fly open, substantially shaking the entire structure of the instrument, and due to the fact that the instrument is cantilevered many feet above floor level, the effect was terrifying. The employment of doors instead of louvers was seen to be a compromise allowing some expression, but without achieving a traditional English swell effect. This type of expression box is seen in some continental instruments, though the doors are not operated by a balanced pedal, but by the organist who has to open or close the doors by hand between playing like the Orgue De Bréda of 1534, France.<sup>50</sup>

### Sound of music

It has become apparent, on the surface (specifically in the church, where the vast majority of neo-classical organs are) that the role of the organ in a simple liturgical sense, such as playing hymns and soft voluntaries, has taken a back seat over the excitement of solo repertoire, as A. L. Flay illuminates:

The baroque revival claimed that it was still possible to make an organ to give a much more accurate account of the music of the period, written as it was by its contemporary composers for the organs of their time – a fact that was so often forgotten or just ignored – which when music performed upon 19<sup>th</sup> century instruments gave false impressions of just how the composers of the music had intended their compositions to sound.<sup>51</sup>

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50 Postcard of this organ from J. M. Fuzeau S. A. Editions, [no date].

51 Flay, A. L., 'Great Oakes from Little Acorns Grown'. *The Organ*. (Sep 1976), 44.

In response to Flay's comments, one wonders, when he talks of the baroque revival claiming to give a more accurate account of music for the period, which baroque school is being implied – German, French, English, Italian? His comments concerning facts being forgotten or just ignored when performed upon nineteenth-century instruments are true. However, if this 'baroque revival' is implying an 'English baroque revival', then it must be recalled that the early English organ (with its long compasses and no pedals) was seen as insular, and rejected to favour the German key system in the mid 1800s. The same could be said for the repertoire. So, does Flay mean the baroque revival claimed we needed to revert to the pedal-less long compassed English instrument to give a more accurate account of the music of the period? If Flay meant the baroque revival to mean the works of Buxtehude, Bach, and other German Masters of organ composition, which I believe he does, the baroque revival is meaningless to Great Britain, as the English organ would never have been able to play their music, or if it did, it would not have been as the composers may have intended it.

Rowntree and Brennan make the points that there is no shortage of organ repertoire, and that a vast, if not the greater part of this repertoire can be played on less than a dozen stops.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the tremendous development and interest in 'early music' we are still far from the day when the vast repertoire of early music, of which we in England have so much – the music of Redford, Preston, Tallis and Byrd from England's 'Golden Age' can be illuminated on an organ in an appropriate acoustic, let alone the later music of Gibbons, Blow and the eighteenth-century school.<sup>53</sup>

What needs to be addressed in relation to the above is, is not the shortage of repertoire, but the shortage of people to play the instruments and its repertoire, or people who have the ability to learn a new repertoire to suit a specific organ. In the case of a professional organist, it would be, and is, a stimulating challenge to learn a new repertoire. But surely, when an organist is not a professional, and possibly plays the organ at the local

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52. Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 2*. 11.

53 Ibid., *Volume*. 3. 11.

church because no one else can, or does so gracefully, but with little time to learn repertoire because of other commitments, playing a repertoire that does not suit the dozen stops, makes the performance all the more arduous for all concerned.

This can relate to the point concerning the swell box, and the musical demands made by people for specific ceremonies. If we take again the above quote concerning the repertoire played on less than a dozen stops, then what happens when a hypothetical bride requests the ever-famous Toccata in F from Organ Symphony 5, by Widor for her wedding? Could one modestly say 'you cannot have this piece because the organ has no suitable sounds for it', and when one demonstrates to prove the point, it is commented, 'it doesn't sound like it does on the CD.' (In fact, the best option would be to play the CD recording on the wedding day.) Of course, there is much repertoire for a small number of stops, Rowntree and Brennan have shown this, as is also evident when entering an organ section of any reputable music shop. Nevertheless, when a piece such as Widor's Toccata has become as much wedding furniture as a vicar, and is frequently requested, a modern neo-classical organ with limited tonal resources is not doing itself any favours to those who have preconceived ideas of organ sound. Conversely, not everybody does want Widor at their wedding,<sup>54</sup> and some buildings with organs do not even entertain weddings. Nonetheless, my point is this; is not the organ sound this country is generally associated with the romantic styled organ, and the repertoire often heard, even if not of romantic leanings, is performed on romantic instruments? We see national events broadcasted on the television enlightening us on such. For example when the national service of remembrance was held at St. Paul's Cathedral, London for the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, the organ sound was Father Willis. When the funeral service for Diana, Princess of Wales was broadcast from Westminster Abbey, London, the organ sound was Harrison & Harrison, and when *The Last Night of*

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<sup>54</sup> Most people seem to want Wagner or Mendelssohn, or something else romantic (often not written for the organ) such as Elgar's *Chanson de Marin* or Schubert's *Ave Maria*.

the Proms is yearly broadcast from The Royal Albert Hall, London, the organ sound is again Father Willis. When Martin Neary performed the Toccata from the Toccata and Fugue in D minor by J. S. Bach for the first night of the 2004 BBC Proms (one of the first public hearings of the instrument after its most recent thorough restoration), the sound of the Father Willis organ was splendid and suited the music, even though it is a romantic instrument. (In chapter four we saw Geraint Jones stating the Royal Albert Hall organ to be unsuitable for Bach. See p55-6.) Furthermore, Neary performed in front of a full Royal Albert Hall, broadcasting live on BBC television and radio. Out of the entire organ repertoire that would work on The Royal Albert Hall's romantic instrument, a piece of baroque organ music was chosen!

#### Position of the instrument

Rowntree and Brennan, in line with Schweitzer at the turn of the century, commented that if an organ is sensibly positioned in a building, meaning not in an organ chamber as was the practice with Victorian and Edwardian instruments, then a smaller instrument will be just as adequate in a medium to large building as a large instrument cramped into an organ chamber:

It should project its sound into the largest space in the building...Given such a position an organ may indeed sing – no longer does it have to scream or shout in order to force its by then ugly tone out of a lean-to shed on the side of a building. Ralph Downes remarked in 1970 putting the organ in another room leads to the need for an increase in power with a resulting forced tonal quality.<sup>55</sup>

The above theory for installing freestanding instruments in churches is very logical and indeed has proven to be successful with numerous instruments, such as St. Michael, Coxwold, St. Oswald, Durham, and the Oxford University Chapels. Whether such instruments sing is quite another matter and is best left to the discretion of the listener and organist. John Speller agrees with Rowntree and Brennan, supporting their claims

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55 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1*. 13.

that smaller instruments, well positioned, are advantageous over cramped larger instruments:

My recent experience of playing and listening to small two-manual instruments inclines me to the opinion that the authors of both these publications are correct in the contention that a small, well-designed and sensibly positioned instrument can fulfil the needs of even moderately large churches with distinction...<sup>56</sup>

There are however, some instruments which have still been too small for their buildings and have been limiting in their musical outcome regardless of their position. The organs in The Roman Catholic Cathedral, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; The King's Hall at the University of Newcastle; and The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham are such instruments that fall into this category. The organist of Newcastle Roman Catholic Cathedral wrote saying 'the organ is too small for the church. It is the wrong organ in the wrong church in the wrong position,'<sup>57</sup> and John Keys, the organist and director of music at St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham also spoke in person and wrote commenting that the organ was 'unable to sustain a large congregation. No registrational aids...Position in relation to choir and congregation is ill considered.'<sup>58</sup>

#### Those with authority

Another theory behind the installation of small instruments under twenty stops is to suit the simple musical demands in churches.<sup>59</sup> Writers on the subject have commented that the classical instrument will suit the simple needs of the liturgy. However, the below quotation from Rowntree and Brennan may lead to interesting speculation as to the motives behind some of these installations:

As might be expected the influence of individuals on the overall pattern are clear, persons such as David Butterworth, Nicholas Danby, Ralph Downes, Peter Hurford, David Lumsden, Richard Marlow, Peter Williams and Donald Wright have all played a part, as have the advisory bodies; the Anglican Organ Advisory Committee and the Roman Catholic Organ

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56 Speller, J., *Within a Dozen Stops*. 182.

57 Questionnaire response from the organist at Newcastle Roman Catholic Cathedral, (Mar 2004).

58 Questionnaire response from Mr. J. Keys, Organist and Director of Music at St. Mary the Virgin, Nottingham, and personal visit to this instrument and discussion with John Keys on 10/01/04.

59 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *Volume 2*. 10.

Advisory Group of which John Rowntree is secretary, and also the British Institute of Organ Studies which was established in 1976.<sup>60</sup>

The classical advocates were actually in small numbers, and many who were, were either academics, and, or professionally trained organists. Was it wrong of these figures to impose such strict views and ideas on the general laity? It is known that Dr. Donald Wright, diocesan organ advisor for the Durham, Sunderland, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne area in the 1970s and 1980s was a keen supporter of the small two manual, mechanical classical organ. However, he spent his time as organist at St. Thomas the Martyr, Newcastle-upon-Tyne playing the large four manual Harrison & Harrison organ with remote detached console of sixty plus stops and electro-pneumatic action.<sup>61</sup>

The passionate views of the classical advocates, in the hope to move towards a reformed organ, at times did little to secure followers, and on a wider scale actually alienated people rather than attract them. In one case, in 1986, an organist of a Roman Catholic Church, who had worked as an organ builder for a major part of his life, was out-numbered and overruled in respect of retaining their Blackett & Howden pipe organ over the installation of a neo-classical pipe organ. The organist wrote saying:

A committee of "experts" ruled and advised...it was and still is my opinion, that the money spent on the new organ should have been spent on a major overhaul of the old... I wonder just whose interests were at the hearts of those who influenced the decision to replace the old with the new.<sup>62</sup>

This sad case at Altrincham, near Cheshire, illuminates concern over these experts intentions. The same organist also commented when writing that 'whilst the variety of

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60 Ibid., 16.

61 Information noted (Mar 2004) when discussing with Mr. I. Nicholson the organist of St. Peter's Church Monkwearmouth the procedures for faculty permission for their new organ after the church fire in 1982. Dr. Wright had suggested that the church need only install a two manual pipe organ with a total of 10 speaking stops. Believing that this would be adequate for this church, regardless that it had a three manual Father Willis organ before the fire. Dr. Wright's proposal was rejected and after much battle at The Durham Consistory Court, the church now possess a very fine three manual 60 stop Copeman-Hart organ with no pipes.

62 Email and questionnaire response received from Mr. T. O'Brien, organist of St. Vincent's Roman Catholic Church, Altrincham, Cheshire. Received 24/02/04.

stop combinations was thought to be limited at the time, [meaning the old organ], it was a dream when compared with the current instrument.'<sup>63</sup>

It appears that in some cases, those who held high positions of authority, like the named few by Rowntree and Brennan, have cunningly abused their position to install new instruments that suit their particular needs or whims.<sup>64</sup> By having a good hierarchical position, they have been able to convince churches that these were the instruments to install, even if the churches were not absolutely convinced of their suitability. Because these were the experts, the church bodies would take the advice with good faith, believing it is the best solution, even if they are too reluctant to admit that they do not like the instruments. Was the church building becoming a scapegoat to house these new musical instruments for a purpose indirectly linked to liturgical needs?

Peter Hurford in the Foreword to Volume 2 of Rowntree and Brennan states that:

We have hopefully reached the state where a church or hall does not buy an organ simply because it is *de rigeur* to have an organ to accompany hymns. A pipe organ is a unique musical instrument with its own vast repertoire.<sup>65</sup>

Hurford is correct, however, surely when an organ is built for or housed in a church, every instrument is unique to the people who own it, and part of its vast repertoire is the performance of the hymns to fulfil its liturgical requirements. This should not be overlooked in respect of the solo repertoire. A pipe organ, unlike most other musical instruments, is usually situated in a church or hall, with the purpose to provide music to suit occasions, and this can often mean accompanying large congregations in song, whether secular or sacred. It is therefore unfair to assume or imply that this role is any in the least bit as important as the solo repertoire. For the layperson, part of the vast repertoire will be hymns and songs played, and much of the solo organ repertoire is often described by congregations as 'boring', 'highbrow', and 'dirge-like'; people rarely

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63 Ibid.

64 See chapter six and the section regarding the case study concerning the organ at Wallsend on Tyne.

65 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 2*. 7.

queue in droves to hear organ music! A pipe organ is not like a flute, piano, or cello, which nine times out of ten is the personal property of an individual, but the property of an institution, in which much money has been raised and spent. The organ can be the most expensive musical instrument, and often only heard for short times. It is the most expensive furnishing a church or hall possesses. To imply that in sacred institutions hymns come second to repertoire, or that one cannot have a swell box, or one has to have mechanical action and no pistons is surely bordering on dictatorship. Naturally, there is another side to my argument, as one of the teachings of the church is 'education'. To install a new organ is one avenue that educates people in the field of music and different period practices. 'Building such an organ is not just fulfilling a fundamental musical need, or meeting the often transitory whims of an existing organist, but rather the making of an act of faith in the future.'<sup>66</sup>

As seen in the professional field, the neo-classical organ, with its fine mechanical action, has done much to improve playing. However, if these instruments had only resided in halls and schools, would the situation be still the same? Even so, there is still a great shortage of church organists!

#### Grant, Degens & Bradbeer and the eclectic organ

To veer away, for the time being, from criticisms of such instruments, many neo-classical instruments were of great importance for a small portion of builders in Britain. Builders such as R. H. Walker (from the J. W. Walker firm) who favoured the Scandinavian type and Peter Collins who worked with Rieger,<sup>67</sup> saw mechanical action as only the starting point of their quest to achieve a classical organ and according to Bicknell 'the most spectacular and accomplished early British effort came from a

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<sup>66</sup> Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 2*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Bicknell, S, *The History of the English Organ*. 344.



wealthy amateur.’<sup>68</sup> This wealthy amateur was Maurice Forsyth-Grant, an electronics expert at the top of his field, who had always had an interest in organs. In 1960 he encouraged some ex-Compton builders to start up business on their own, (he began his organ building connections with this firm). Forsyth-Grant was a great eccentric and during the Second World War, whilst serving the country, he would order organ parts, including pipes, so that upon his return home he would be greeted with many organ components, which he would then assemble. Because of his wealth, (he was left a small fortune by his godfather in 1937)<sup>69</sup> he was also able to travel to Europe on many occasions to study famous baroque organs of Germany and Holland, making the acquaintances of many organ builders as he went. This is why he became influenced by the continental organ and why he stopped building in the ‘Compton style’ and adopted the classical style. His firm exploited the most modern of advances from the work of German builders and he tells us that the German organ builders would quite happily provide him with the instructions or plans of new building practices:

We had bought a few modern slider windchests from Germany and with my frequent visits to continental organ-builders (many of whom were kind enough to give me working drawings)...<sup>70</sup>

and

This was the first time that I noticed an in-built regulator in the bottom of a windchest *and* equipped with a most unusual spring arrangement – what I now call the ‘Rhombic Spring’ assembly. I later met Josef in Strasbourg in 1965 when he let me into most of the secrets.<sup>71</sup>

Grant, Degens & Bradbeer (GDB), as they were to become, produced organs using new technology and materials, which owed much to the modern movement in product design and architecture.<sup>72</sup> The firm built many instruments of varying sizes in their post Compton period and some instruments contained mechanical key action and electric stop action, and some contained electric key and stop action (whether being draw-stops

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68 Ibid.

69 Forsyth-Grant, M., *Twenty-One Years of Organ Building*. 16.

70 Ibid., 30.

71 Ibid., 47.

72 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 344.

or tab-stops), but all employed classical voicing principles and the most modern of materials. Their most famous instrument is that at New College Chapel, Oxford. This instrument was built in 1969 and is described by its builder as their “Magnum Opus”.<sup>73</sup> This instrument originally contained a swell division enclosed in glass shutters. However, these have since been replaced by see-through Perspex, as some years ago, during a recital, the glass shutters shattered.<sup>74</sup> The idea of using modern materials became an area that organ builders would exploit, and sometimes with bad results. However, it was seen as a necessity to try to mix old with new as much as was based on trial, error, and experimentation. The workmanship of Grant Degens & Bradbeer can be paralleled to the ingenious work of Willis and Hope-Jones, who experimented with the latest technological inventions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In place of traditional materials such as wood, Grant would employ more modern materials such as plastic, perspex and steel,<sup>75</sup> and this is clearly seen in his organ at New College (1969), The University of York (1969/70) and St. Mary’s RC Priory (The Servite Priory) Fulham Road, London (1968). The latter instrument is of importance to British organ building as it was the first three manual mechanical action instrument to be built in Britain for many years, and it also contains aluminium trackers and pallets.<sup>76</sup>

In May 1994, Paul Hale, (one of the first organ scholars to take seat at the New College instrument), gave a paper entitled ‘Lecture to the Maurice Forsyth-Grant Memorial Celebration’. When praising the works of Grant for his use of modern materials, Hale said that:

Aluminium trackerwork and collets, tapped plastic adjusters, needle bearings and clip-on connections, along with plastic-sheathed stranded wire for pedal tracker runs were other

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73 Forsyth-Grant, M., *Twenty-One Years of Organ Building*. 133-45.

74 Discussions held with the present organ scholar at New College, Oxford on 17/02/04.

75 Forsyth-Grant could be grouped with harpsichord maker Challis, who is also known to have used modern materials in his instruments.

76 Forsyth-Grant, M., *Twenty-One Years of Organ Building*. 129.

features of his actions. Despite the current trend away from the materials, GDB actions stand out as being far superior to anything else produced in this country until the early eighties.<sup>77</sup>

Grant enjoyed his career enormously and became most famous for his instrument at New College. The New College instrument, with its modern casework, (described by some, including the present organ scholar as a 'space-ship' or something to that effect), was revolutionary in terms of materials, tonal ideas, and construction. Grant, Degens & Bradbeer provided their organs, including New College, with much upperwork. However, they do seem to lack foundation tone. The present organ scholar at New College confirmed this verbally and furthermore it was noticeable when playing the instrument. It is interesting to recall that at the turn of the twentieth century Hope-Jones was removing all traces of upperwork in place of foundation tone and here, sixty years latter, much foundation tone is removed in place of upperwork. If this organ had contained a pedal 16ft' open wood rank instead of an open metal it would have given a greater balanced to the organ. The 16ft' subbass and 16ft' principal were not weighty enough to evenly balance the instrument because the sound was 'top heavy'. This was also true when playing the York University organ a month earlier. This instrument is a similar size to New College, but void of the 16ft' principal on the pedal; the only 16ft' flue being a subbass. All of the classical instruments which have been visited to date, including Hexham Abbey, Merton College Oxford and The London Oratory, presented the same conclusions reached at New College and York University. It is interesting as a comparison that the instrument built by Kenneth Jones in 1989 for Lorretto School near Edinburgh included a 16ft' open wood in place of a 16ft' principal on the pedal because of the quick decay of bass-end frequencies:

The decision as to whether or not the 16' principal on the Pedal should be of wood or metal was held until the last moment. Because of the very quick decay of bass-end frequencies (particularly acute when the chapel is full), it was finally decided that a heavy, resonant, wide-

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77 Hale, P., Lecture to the Maurice Forsyth-Grant Memorial Celebration. 14<sup>th</sup> May 1994, 3. (A copy of this lecture was given to me by its author in August 2003.)

scale wood stop would be the most suitable. Indeed, the resulting Open Wood...has proved itself subsequent in a most admirable fashion.<sup>78</sup>

(It is now known that Bach requested stops with gravitas, and Dáhnert talks of Bach wanting a 32ft' Untersatz made of wood for the organ at Mühlhausen to give the instrument the best "gravity".<sup>79</sup>) However, regardless of this flaw, the New College instrument is a most interesting specimen and Bicknell describes it 'to those who had ears to hear, the instrument was stimulating and successful, albeit something of a one off.'<sup>80</sup> In the 1980s this instrument was tamed somewhat and the great organ was revoiced to be more sympathetic with voices. According to the present organ scholar at New College, and from hearing this instrument, the great organ is now underpowered and swamped by the swell and positiv. When corresponding with Dr. Higginbottom, director of music at New College Oxford, he said:

I've 'received' this instrument. I also had it cleaned and revoiced in the mid 1980s. It's been tamed somewhat... it has its place in the listing of UK organ building, but if somebody offered me £500k I'd have no hesitation in starting again.<sup>81</sup>

The New College organ falls into the category of being an eclectic organ, like The Royal Festival Hall instrument, (although not to the agreement of its designer). These instruments have proved that a number of organ building styles can be combined. Many organists and scholars over the years soon realised that because of the wide spectrum of organ repertoire inherited, one style of instrument was proving difficult and cumbersome to demanding players:

It is by now a truism that a successful church organ must be a compromise if it is to fulfil adequately the various demands of performing organ music of all schools and the accompaniment of congregation and choir.<sup>82</sup>

Some tried to fight back by arguing that one should not mix building styles:

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78 Fitzgerald, R., *The Organs of Lorretto School. A Short History and Guild*. Omagh, Co. Tyrone, Graham & Sons, [no date], 13.

79 Dáhnert, U., 'Organs Played and Tested by J. S. Bach'. in: Stauffer, G., & May, E., ed., *J. S. Bach as Organist*. Indiana University Press, 1986. 6.

80 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 346.

81 Questionnaire response from with Dr. E. Higginbottom of New College Oxford, (Mar 2004).

82 Morris, P., 'The Organ in All Saints Parish Church, West Bromwich'. *The Organ*, (Oct 1971), 52.

Organ music itself must influence the character of each stop and its relationship to others. It is useless to have a magnificent this or a beautiful that if it does not serve a useful purpose with the general design of the instrument.<sup>83</sup>

but realistically this is impractical, especially when performers were, and are, expected to play romantic repertoire and the traditional English choral music. More eclectic organs began to appear which, like at The Royal Festival Hall and to some extents New College, contain classically voiced pipework with fully developed principal choruses on each manuals, but having some divisions voiced on German principles and others on English, and or, French principles. These instruments would also contain a swell box, mechanical or pneumatic key action, electric stop action, some gadgetry such as limiting thumb and toe pistons, and English pedalboards. Some argued that it was the tone that was of most importance to the organ and other aspects proceeded. 'In the organ, all else being equal, pipes are of prime importance. In Richard Rensch's words 'a real organ has pipes.'<sup>84</sup> Others protested and argued that the instrument must be viewed as a whole and not just one thing or another. 'It seeks to be a first-class musical instrument; it aspires to standards of excellence in sound, mechanism and appearance...'<sup>85</sup>

Many instruments of the period, whether classically constructed or not, began to contain eclectic stop lists and styles of voicings to allow the playing of all musical styles to some degree. 'The intention was to render possible the performance of music of all styles and periods.'<sup>86</sup> Hendrickson commented that since polyphony appears in a wide range of musical styles and periods, the organ should be able to accommodate them.<sup>87</sup> This led to chaotic stop lists, but did at least give the opportunity to play many styles of music more successfully.<sup>88</sup> Many eclectic instruments have been some of the best this

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83 Green, D. L. I., 'The Organ in Horsell Parish Church, Working, Surrey'. *The Organ*, (1975), 29.

84 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1*. 10.

85 Ibid., 9.

86 Bicknell, S., *The History of the British Organ*. 349.

87 Hendrickson, C., *Tonal Architecture IV*. The American Guild of Organists, 1999, [www.frontiernet.net/~soulek/articles/tonalarcfour.html](http://www.frontiernet.net/~soulek/articles/tonalarcfour.html) (accessed 24/11/03).

88 In October 2003, I attended the dedication service of the new parish priest for St. Oswald's parish church, Durham. This church contains a classical organ dated 1988, (quite late in the period) and before

country has seen. These eclectic instruments might be influenced by neo-classical specifications, but these were only influences and electro pneumatic action was to be the norm, often, because of the instruments size and the mixture of voicing styles, which would require higher wind pressures, therefore making mechanical action impossible. Instruments by J. W. Walker for Ampleforth Abbey (1961) and Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral (1967) and Harrison & Harrison for Coventry Cathedral (1962) are superb instruments employing some neo-classical pipework, but also accommodating the best features of the English organ, making them sympathetic for the choral liturgy requirements:

...organs such as Coventry Cathedral and Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral brought a more coherent classical sound to the centres of the established churches, and showed that classicism was not necessarily an enemy of choral accompaniment.<sup>89</sup>

To enhance the aforementioned eclectic instruments, each one is housed in an acoustically friendly building. As McVicker states 'it is often said that the best stop on an organ is its acoustic'.<sup>90</sup> When hearing live the organ in Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral, it was striking how well the neo-classical voicing worked in its vast acoustic. There seemed to be much chiffing coming from the instrument and it made one wonder whether the instrument would be as successful in a dryer acoustic? The Coventry instrument, according to Bicknell, retained some of the earlier Harrison traditions, but also had influences of The Royal Festival Hall instrument and others built with the consultation of Ralph Downes.<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to recall that the chief protagonists of the classical organ revival believed that instruments should not mix styles from different countries and periods. This on the other hand, has shown to be all well and good in theory, but less successful in practice. To fulfil the vast spectrum of

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the service the organist play a piece by Messiaen. The sound of the organ was appalling. Noises rather than notes were being emitted from the fine case work, which one could only presume were the swell reeds. In the pews behind me, the comments being made about the sound and the instrument in general were far from favourable. 1/10/03.

89 Bicknell, S., *The History of the British Organ*. 349.

90 McVicker. W., 'Future Plans At The Royal Festival Hall'. (Apr 2004), 8.

91 Ibid.

repertoire whether choral or solo, which is often demanded, instruments must be versatile. After all, the reason styles were never mixed centuries ago was because they did not have the vast styles we have inherited, and therefore there was no option. Parr states 'if there is difficulty distinguishing between versatility and eclecticism, then "eclectic" must cease to be a term of abuse.'<sup>92</sup> Having a mixture of styles can be a benefit. If organs are voiced well enough, then the mixture of styles should enhance the instrument and not hinder it:

Any organ builder who cannot make his new organ sound as beautiful as his favourite old one needs to start to learn the Art of voicing and site finishing – just as it was so assiduously practiced both in the nineteenth century, and in all preceding generations. The dissection-slab functionalism of modern analysis is not enough to make a musical instrument. Craft, skill, taste and inspiration are essential to the recipe.<sup>93</sup>

#### The other direction the organ was taking

The classical revival was just one direction organ building was taking during the second half of the twentieth century, though it is undoubtedly the most important. It is important to be aware that not everyone required a classical organ (like Wesley in the mid 1800s who still wanted long manual compasses for St. George's Hall, Liverpool). Many fine Victorian and Edwardian instruments giving good service would more than likely have received a 'face lift', which usually meant minor 'additions', and it was common to replace choir organ strings with mutations to produce a 'hybrid neo-positiv'. The advantage of this was it gave some flexibility to instruments that were good-enough to keep, but needed up dating without losing their heritage. In some instances however, new pipework would not blend with existing pipework and would stand out offensively and be blatantly obvious that it was not part of the original organ. Two examples that come to mind are the Postill/Denman organ in Thirsk Parish Church, North Yorkshire, which was rebuilt by Mander's in the 1960s. The choir organ was removed from the

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<sup>92</sup> Parr, H., *British Organs, Past, Present and Future*. 8.

<sup>93</sup> Bicknell, S., 'The Artistic Revival. Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. No. 6 of 6 articles published in *Choir & Organ* in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'. 3.

main case and installed some distance from the main organ on a platform in the chancel to form a choir/positiv. Unfortunately, this was not the most successful of schemes, as the pipework is of poor quality (always out of tune) and the action is direct electric in comparison to the rest of the instrument which is all mechanical (except the stop action, which was mechanical until the Mander rebuild). Another, but not so drastic example is the Willis I & II instrument originally built for St. Andrew's Church, Sharrow, Sheffield (church demolished 1998), but now residing in St. Columba's Church Topcliffe, North Yorkshire, when in 1973 Wood's of Huddersfield removed the choir viola de gamba and dulciana, and replaced them with a tierce and larigot made by Rodgers pipe-makers of Leeds. Such additions were unsympathetic to the superb voicing of Willis and stood out like a sore thumb. In the removal of this organ to Topcliffe the removed string ranks were replaced after repair (they had been 'dumped' at the back of the organ in Sheffield when the mutations were installed) and the mutations have also been retained, but tamed somewhat to blend with the rest of the instrument. The larigot has been transposed down to form a 2ft' spitzflöte as the division lacked a 2ft' pitch, but the tierce has remained.<sup>94</sup>

The fine Cathedral instruments of the Victorian and Edwardian period did not escape unscathed. At Ely Cathedral in 1974-5 under the consultation of Arthur Wills and Cecil Clutton, this fine instrument by Hill / Harrison & Harrison was drastically revoiced to remove the so-called outdated Edwardian characteristics. The tuba was revoiced as an orchestral trumpet, the great reeds were also revoiced, all the wind pressures were lowered, and a new positiv division added. To cut a long story short, this instrument was restored in 2001, and the aim was to restore some of the whims of the 1970s. The tuba was returned and a new orchestral trumpet added.<sup>95</sup> Other cathedral

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<sup>94</sup> Personal associations with these instruments.

<sup>95</sup> Thistlethwaite, N., & Russill, P., 'Ely Cathedral. The restoration by Harrison & Harrison. The historical background and The Harrison organ in 2001'. *Organ Building, Journal for the Institute of British Organ Building*, IBO, (2002), 41-52.



instruments during the 1970s gained a positiv section, such as Durham Cathedral 1970<sup>96</sup> and St. Paul's Cathedral 1972-77, but both these instruments were not revoiced. At St. Paul's, the remit was to leave the Willis work untouched. 'It was the intention to return the chancel organ to a state close to Willis's original (1872) conception.'<sup>97</sup>

At the bottom end of the organ building market there was an influx of extension organs. Such instruments were cheaper to build than a conventional pipe organ and even an electronic organ. Although they contained real pipes, it was the norm for small instruments to have between three and six ranks of pipes that would be extended to produce vast numbers of stops. This became a cheap and easy way to build pipe organs and it helped the fight against the hype caused by the creation of the electronic organ.<sup>98</sup>

A typical four rank extension organ would contain a rank of diapason, flute, string, and reed pipes and often all enclosed in a swell box. These ranks could extend from 32ft' upwards to give unisons and mixtures. Extension organs have direct electric action which sends direct electrical signals to electric magnets in the wind chest when a key is pressed and a specific stop is activated. There are no 'sliders' or 'spring-pallets'; each pipe has its own individual electric magnet fastened to the inside of the wind chest; (large bass notes have more than one magnet). This gives the flexibility to allow one pipe to be used at different pitches on the keyboard without the need for extra pipes. For example, if a middle C on the 8ft' diapason rank is pressed, and then the tenor C on the 4ft' principal is pressed, there would be no change in sound as it would be the same pipe. The firm 'The Vincent Organ Company Ltd., Sunderland' built many organs of this style to varying degrees of success in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, many of which are still giving sturdy service today and can be seen in many small churches and chapels

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96 Hird, R. and Lancelot, J., *Durham Cathedral Organs*. Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral, 1991, 37.

97 Thistlethwaite, N., 'Things New and Old The Work of N. P. Mander LTD, 1945-1983'. *Fanfare for an Organ Builder. Essays presented to Noel Mander*. Oxford, Positive Press, 1996, 72.

98 Discussions with Mr. I Nicholson of The Vincent Organ Company Ltd., Sunderland, 17/03/04.

across the North-East of England. In a recent discussion with Mr. I. Nicholson (director of Vincent Organs, Sunderland) he mentioned that some of their extension organs were better than others and that he always believed that such instruments needed a minimum of four ranks of pipes to be best effective. He said that in the past they had (under the direction of H. O. Vincent, Son of the founder of the firm H. S. Vincent, who incidentally built some very fine instruments of non-extension practices, in the style of Edmund Schulze), built extension organs with only three ranks; diapason, flute, and string. This, he said was at times telling, but was often all that a small church or chapel could afford. Mr. Nicholson also commented that the churches were pleased with their instruments, and more to the point they did, and still do the job intended to do, which is to play the hymns and provide simple voluntaries. The Vincent extension instruments that still exist today have required minimum attention; only tunings and minor adjustments.<sup>99</sup> On a recent visit with Mr. Nicholson to Thropton United Reformed Church, Northumberland, one was sincerely impressed by the three rank extension organ built by Vincent's in the 1960s. Eight stops were derived from three ranks of pipes being playable on two manuals and pedal. There were no couplers as each division has the same stops. The whole instrument was enclosed and sounded very effective and acceptable. It is a most ingenious design. To access the instrument the console was hinged on the right and opened outwards to allow access into the instrument. On ground level was the blower and bellows and above was the chest with pipes.<sup>100</sup> Other organ building firms also built extension organs, Compton being the most famous, and even Maurice Forsyth-Grant employed the extension principle into his pre-classical instrument. Firms such as Wood Wordsworth of Leeds built extension organs (St. Wilfred's RC. Church, Ripon, North Yorkshire) and a particularly fine extension organ was built by Rushworth & Dreaper in 1973 for the parish church of

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<sup>99</sup> Discussion with Mr. I. Nicholson of Vincent Organs, Sunderland, 17/03/04.

<sup>100</sup> Visitation to Thropton URC Church, Northumberland, 12/05/04.

Barrowford, near Burnley in Lancashire. This instrument contains a very fine diapason rank and a good quality reed, which makes a very satisfying instrument. However, extension organs have been ridiculed by purists over the years for the theory behind their construction rather than for their purpose. It then perhaps comes as no surprise that the electronic instrument (or a 'do-everything' ersatz model as Dalton calls them)<sup>101</sup> which is now becoming much more acceptable (and in some cases offering more scope than a small pipe instrument) was also ridiculed and spoken of despairingly; described as "frauds" and "the unmentionables". Whatever the purist may think about the electronic instrument, many of them have to be commended for their almost accurate sound. It is of great amusement to read that the school at Oundle, which in 1984 installed a three manual Frobenius classical pipe organ in consultation with John Brennan and Donald Wright into its large chapel, in 2001 installed a large three manual Copeman Hart digital organ to cope with the accompanimental demands the Frobenius organ failed at. Andrew Cleary, the director of music wrote in 2001:

We have been looking for an organ able to learn strong hymn singing yet to offer the versatility required for the accompaniment of the Chapel Choir. The new Copeman Hart instrument in the School Chapel has proved to be more than able to meet these requirements...<sup>102</sup>

The organist of the school, John Arkell wrote:

This superb organ is well equipped to accompany easily and effectively across the board spectrum of music for the Anglican liturgy... we now have in the chapel the best of both worlds – I am spoilt for choice when it comes to teaching and practicing.<sup>103</sup>

The school's headmaster Dr. Townsend also commented that 'the repertoire of the choir has expanded accordingly',<sup>104</sup> and to conclude, the senior school Chaplain, Revd,

I. Browne wrote:

We have been looking for an instrument with the power, variety and colour to lead the singing of over seven hundred voices. We now have a marvellous romantic instrument to complement our classical pipe organ.<sup>105</sup>

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101 Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 1*. 8.

102 Copeman Hart Goes To Oundle. Advertisement article produced by the firm for the inside cover of *Church Music Quarterly*, (Apr 2001).

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

In spite of the other direction organ building was taking during the revival, and the versatility seen in the eclectic styled organ over the neo-classical instrument, for an organ to have any real importance and be worthy of high praise from leading organists, instruments needed to have mechanical action and classically voiced pipework, or at the very least, classically voiced pipework.

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105 Ibid.

## Chapter 6

### The Survey

I have intended to gather direct information about the success of the neo-classical organs installed in Great Britain throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This chapter will examine the responses received to a carefully crafted questionnaire sent to institutions in Great Britain possessing neo-classical organs. As far as I am aware this has not yet been done: 'A main reason for surveys is to *collect information that is available from no other source*.'<sup>1</sup>

Most people, according to Fowler, are familiar with three types of survey techniques: the measurement of public opinion for newspaper and magazine articles; the measurement of political perceptions and opinions to help political candidates with their elections; and market research designed to understand better consumer preferences and interests.<sup>2</sup> There are many varieties of applications of survey methods, some which deal with factual material, some designed to gauge opinion. As Fowler notes, many facts can be obtained just by asking people. 'Each of these well-developed programs of survey research is aimed primarily at tapping the subjective feelings of the public.'<sup>3</sup>

In respect of my survey, views and opinions were sought about the success (or otherwise) of the neo-classical organs installed in Great Britain. This has been achieved by asking a sample of organists (or institution officials) to complete a questionnaire. In line with the recommendations of Fowler, enclosed with the questionnaire was a covering letter informing the respondents of the purpose. (The questionnaire and

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1 Fowler, F. J. Jr., *Survey Research Methods. Revised Edition. Applied Social Research Method Series. Volume 1*. Sage Publications Inc. 211 West Hillcrest Drive, Newbury Park, California 91320, 1984/1988, 12.

2 Ibid., 10.

3 Ibid.

covering letter can be found in appendix 1.) It was decided for the present purpose, the questionnaire would have to be limited to instruments which contained mechanical key action. The three volumes published by Rowntree and Brennan catalogue such instruments installed in Great Britain between 1954 and 1990, and they provided the source of the great majority of the sample I have used. In doing so, I have deliberately restricted my enquiries to instruments defined as neo-classical by these authors, whose work has inspired my own research. 'Data from a properly chosen sample are a great improvement over data from a sample of those who attended meetings, speak loudest, volunteer to respond, or happen to be convenient to poll.'<sup>4</sup>

### Response

One hundred and six questionnaires were sent out.<sup>5</sup> Forty-one questionnaires were returned complete, six were returned attached with note explaining there was no-one available at the institution who could give any relevant information, and two emails were received, also explaining there was no one able to provide relevant information.<sup>6</sup> In error, one questionnaire arrived at The London Oratory. The Oratory organ has classically voiced pipe-work, but electric action. However, as the questionnaire was kindly returned complete, the responses have been included in these results.

### Method

The majority of the questionnaire presents a number of predetermined options and then offers the respondent an opportunity to give a more personal response should they wish

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4 Fowler, F. J. Jr., *Survey Research Methods*. 11.

5 Institutions questioned were Churches (Anglican, Catholic and non-conformist), Cathedrals, University Chapels, University Music Departments, Concert Halls and Schools.

6 An example was the Church of St. Edward the Confessor, Romford. There are two churches in Romford affiliated to the same Saint, one Anglican and one Roman Catholic. It was the Anglican Church that was of relevance and the questionnaire, in error, arrived at the RC Church. A letter was received from the RC Church informing such and hence, another questionnaire was sent out to the Anglican Church. To date no reply has been received from the Anglican Church.

to. Occasionally, the format of the response is left completely open (for example Q. 13). In both cases I have taken the liberty of interpreting and categorising similar responses to present the broader picture. Raw responses to open questions (or those expressed under *Other*) are available in appendix 2 for you to make your own judgements.

The questionnaire frequently asked respondents to select from a number of possible options and to indicate, in addition, their priority within their responses. Responses were inconsistently presented: some responded as requested; some did not indicate priority; the number of responses chosen varied. To handle the inconsistencies the following weighting system has been adopted:

- a) Where a number of prioritised responses were given, the first priority option was awarded a score equal to the total number of options available; the score then reduces by one for each reduction in priority.
- b) Where responses are not prioritised, the scores awarded are equal so that the total points for the question equal the total that would have been awarded had priorities been expressed.

## The Results

*Q1. (a) What year was the project conceived?*

*(b) What year was the organ first played?*

Figure 1 shows how many of the sampled organs were built in the decades in question and Figure 2 shows how many years the individual projects took.



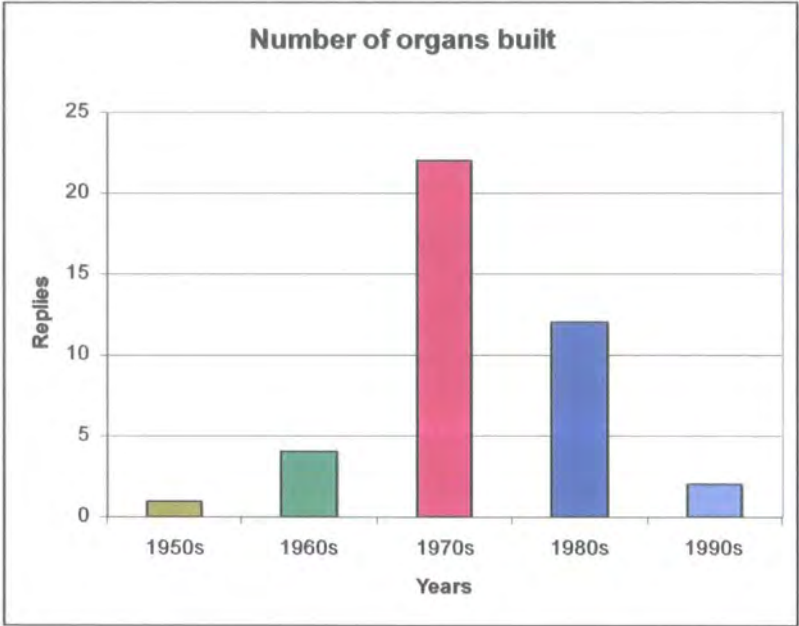


Figure 1.

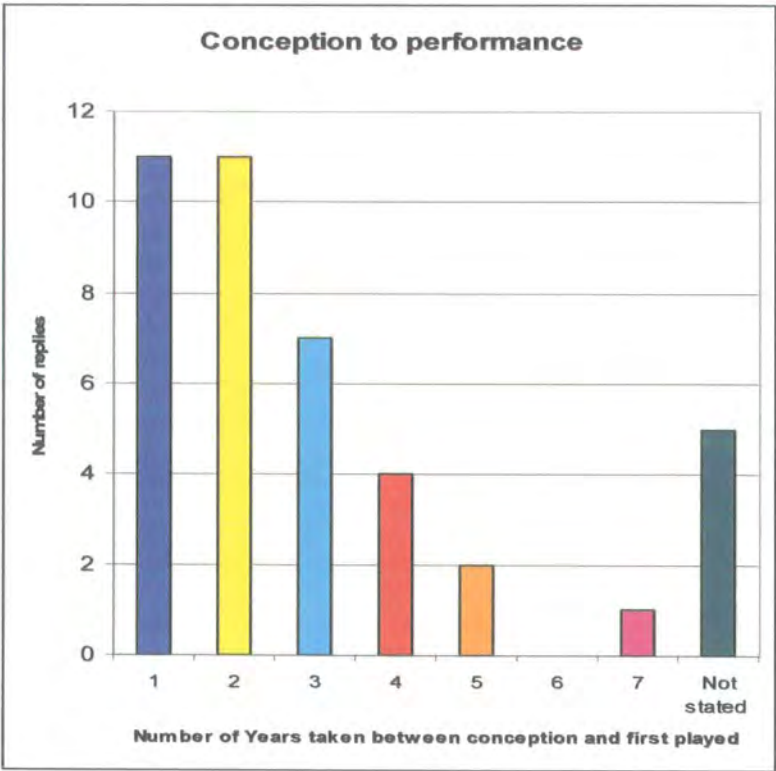


Figure 2.



Q2. What is the size (roughly) of the organ in terms of speaking stops and divisions (include Pedal as one division)?

The Rowntree and Brennan volumes list the size and specification of the instruments. However, I needed to see whether any alterations had subsequently been made. Figure 3 shows the range of instruments and Figure 4 shows the size of instruments in churches (the majority).

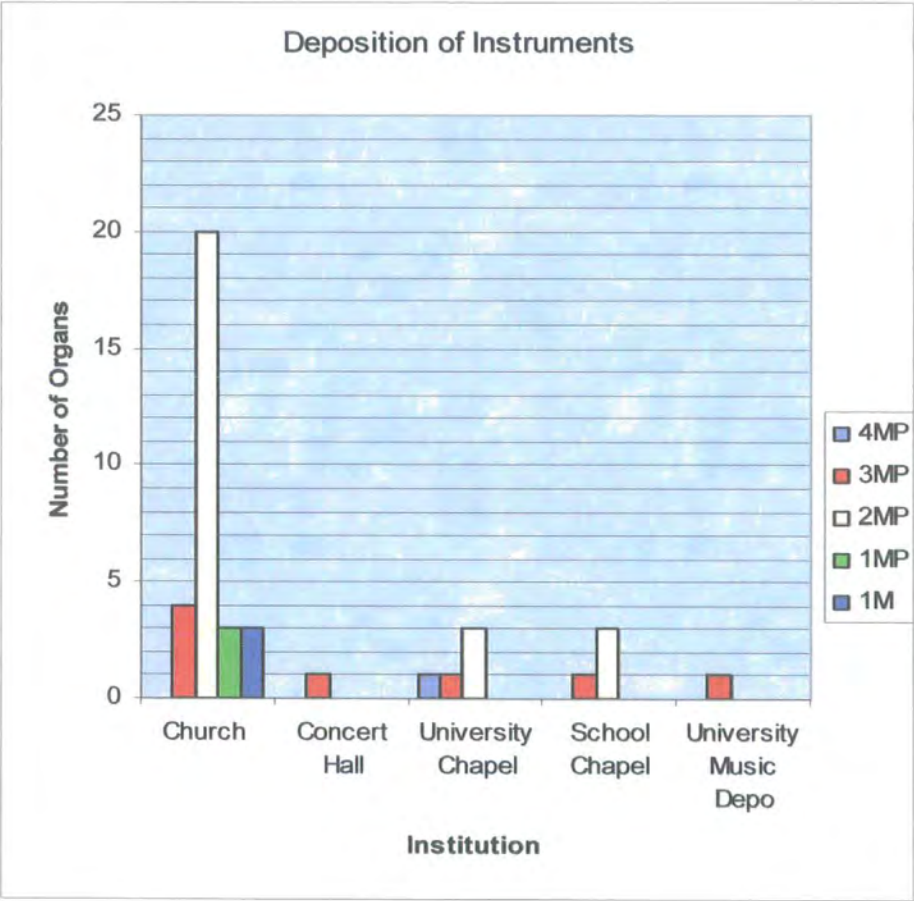


Figure 3.

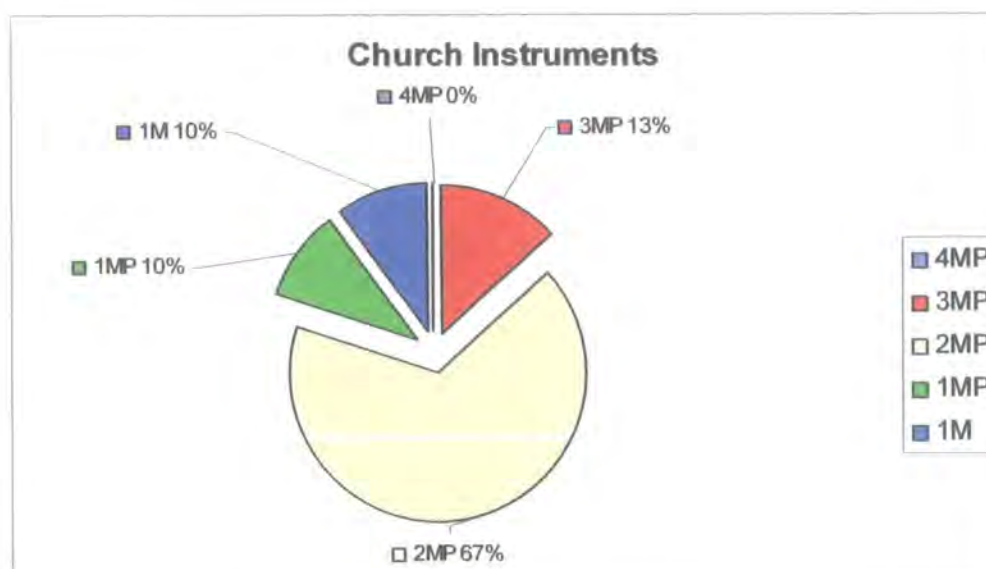


Figure 4.

*Q3. Why was a new Instrument installed?*

Some of the organs in question had replaced larger instruments: at Hexham Abbey and St. Mary, Nottingham a four manual; at Newcastle Roman Catholic Cathedral a three manual. Others replaced electronic instruments like Stoke D'Abernon and Lanchester. As mentioned previously, the effects of the two World Wars and, to some extent, the distraction of the electronic organ had slowed the progress of pipe organ building and design to an almost standstill. Many existing Victorian and Edwardian instruments had also become neglected and required attention, but not necessarily as a result of the War. From the results gathered (Figure 5.), 41% of the old instruments in question seem to have fallen into this category. Perhaps one might speculate that least in the case of Anglican churches, Parochial Church Council's either did not have the money to spend on the upkeep of organs, or did not realise the necessity of doing so if the organ was to be played on a Sunday by Sunday basis.

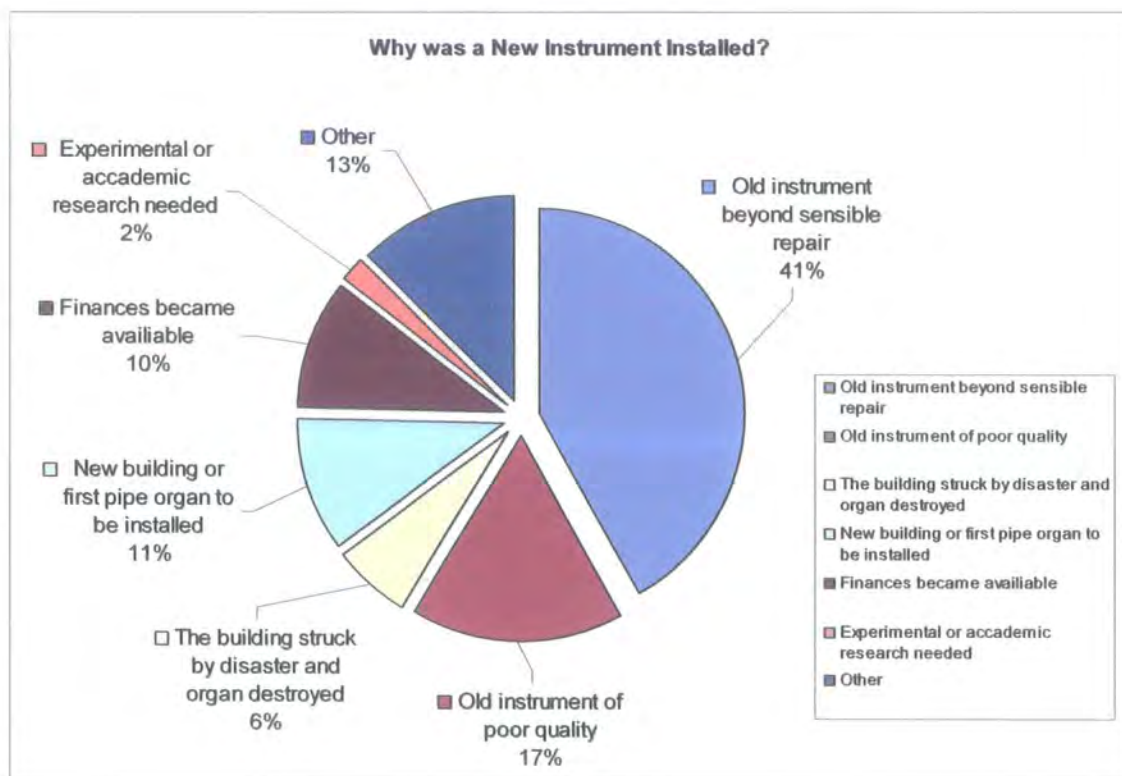


Figure 5.

The category *Other*, produced recurring replies. These have been absorbed into new categories in which are shown in Figure 6.

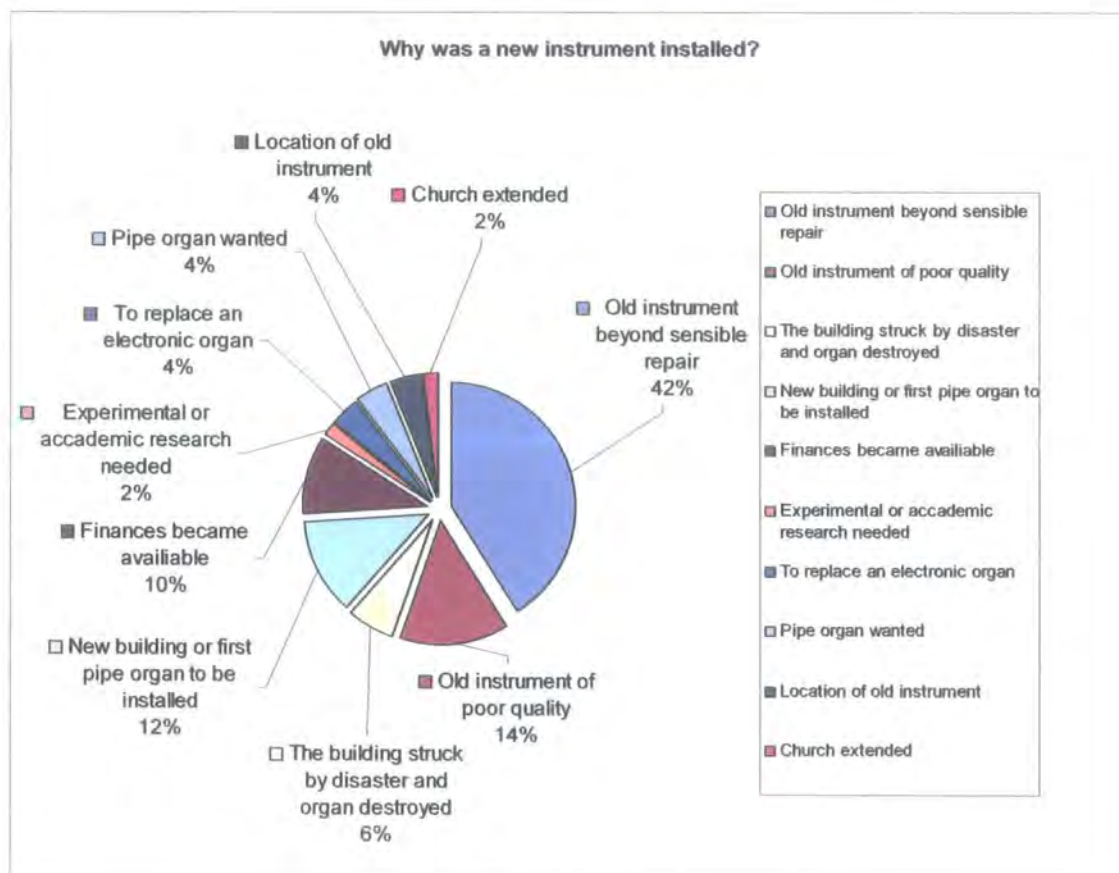


Figure 6.

Q4. Which alternative options were seriously considered?

Figure 7 shows the results of the options that were seriously considered, but not acted upon.

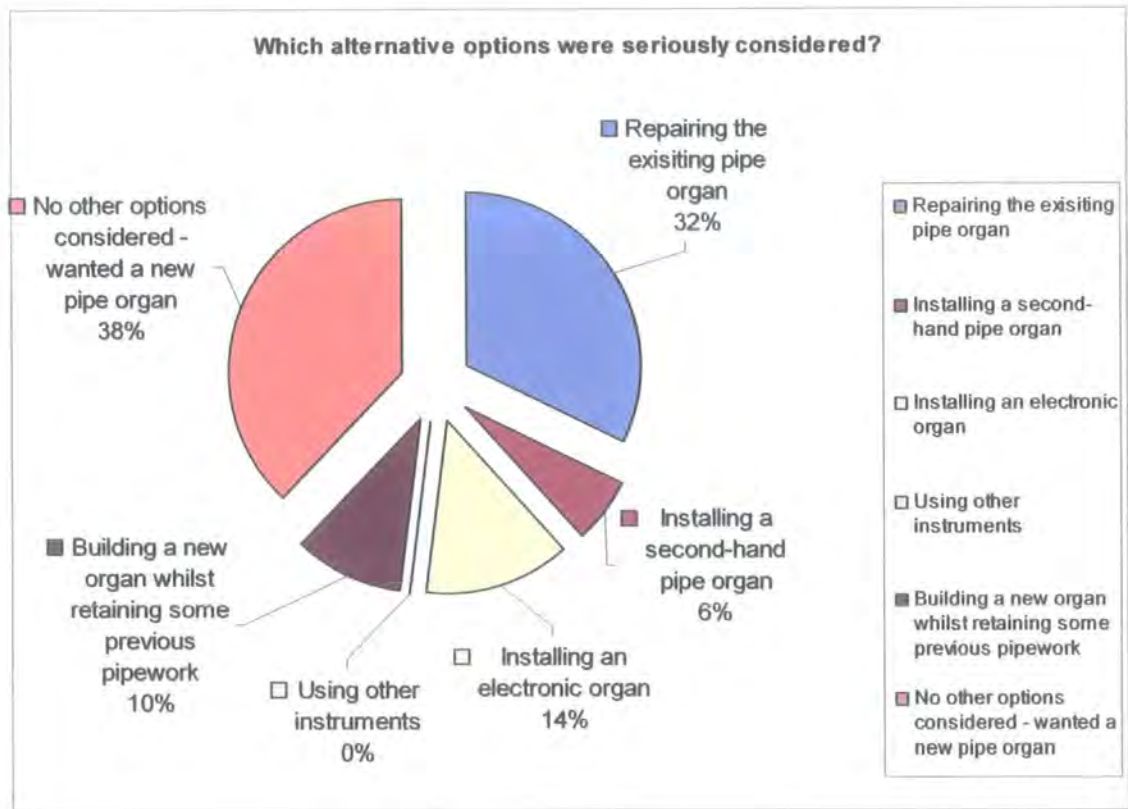


Figure 7.

The category *Other* has been used consistently to record a complete dismissal of other options and has been re-labelled accordingly (Figure 7). It is interesting, and affirmative, to note that none of the institutions questioned (including the churches) had wanted to discard the pipe organ in favour of other instruments. This attests that, in the case of the institutions questioned, the organ was (is) seen as a vital part of the musical heritage and liturgical musical heritage, and not to be replaced or rejected. Of the 11% that were installing an instrument into a new building (or the first instrument for their existing building) as seen in Figure 5, all institutions wanted a pipe organ and had considered no other instruments.



Q5. Why was the decision taken to build a neo-classical organ?

Figure 8 shows the results. The *Other* category in the questionnaire has been replaced by three extra headings.

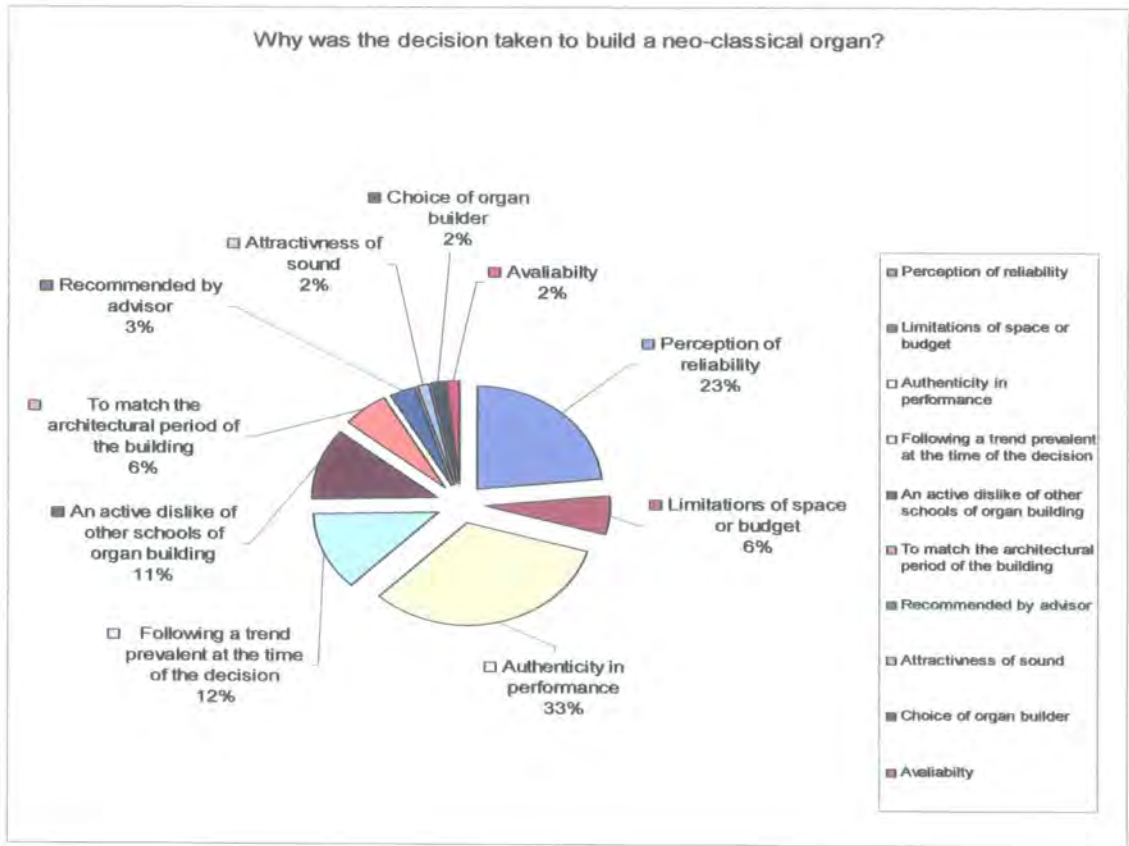


Figure 8.

Q6. Where did the money come from to finance the project?

Figure 9. shows the results.

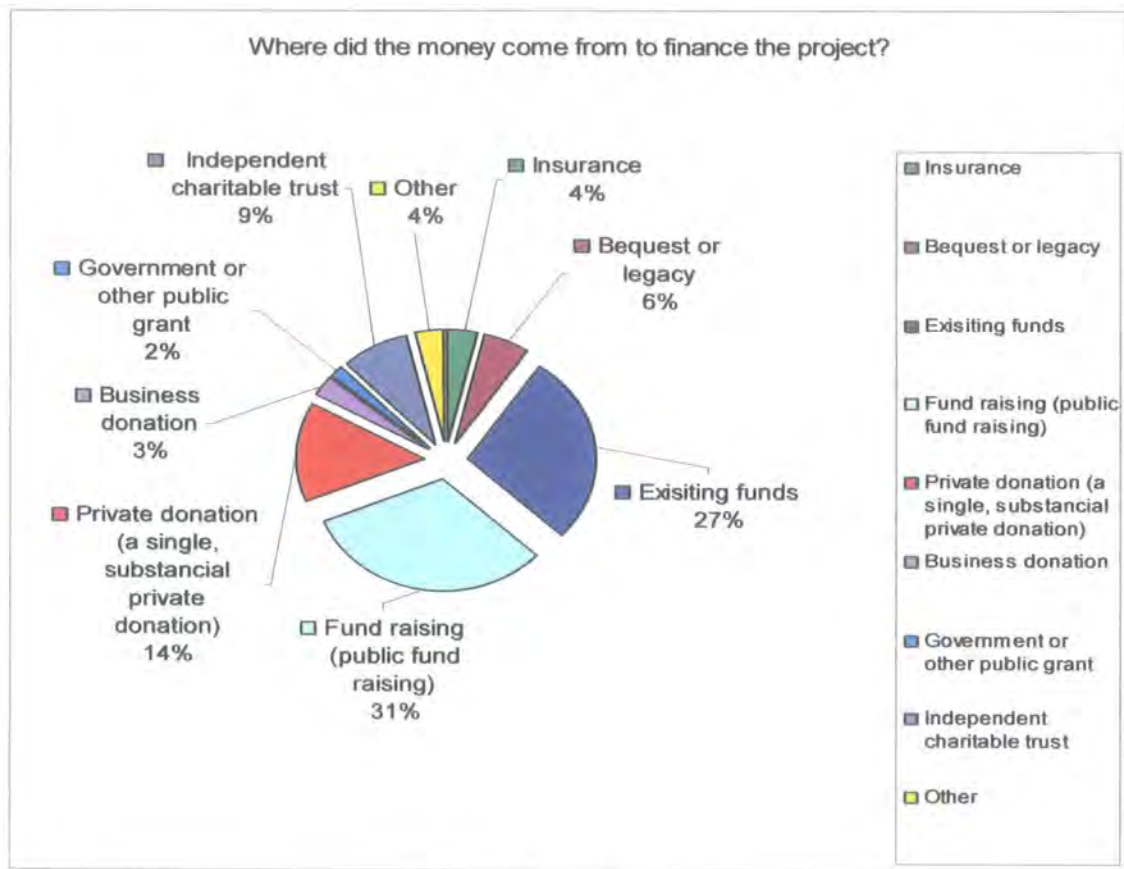


Figure 9.

The *Other* category includes 3 respondents who withheld information, 1 respondent informed me that the organ was a gift, and 1 respondent commented that a small percentage of the money came from the sale of the old organ parts for scrap. Figure 10 shows this.

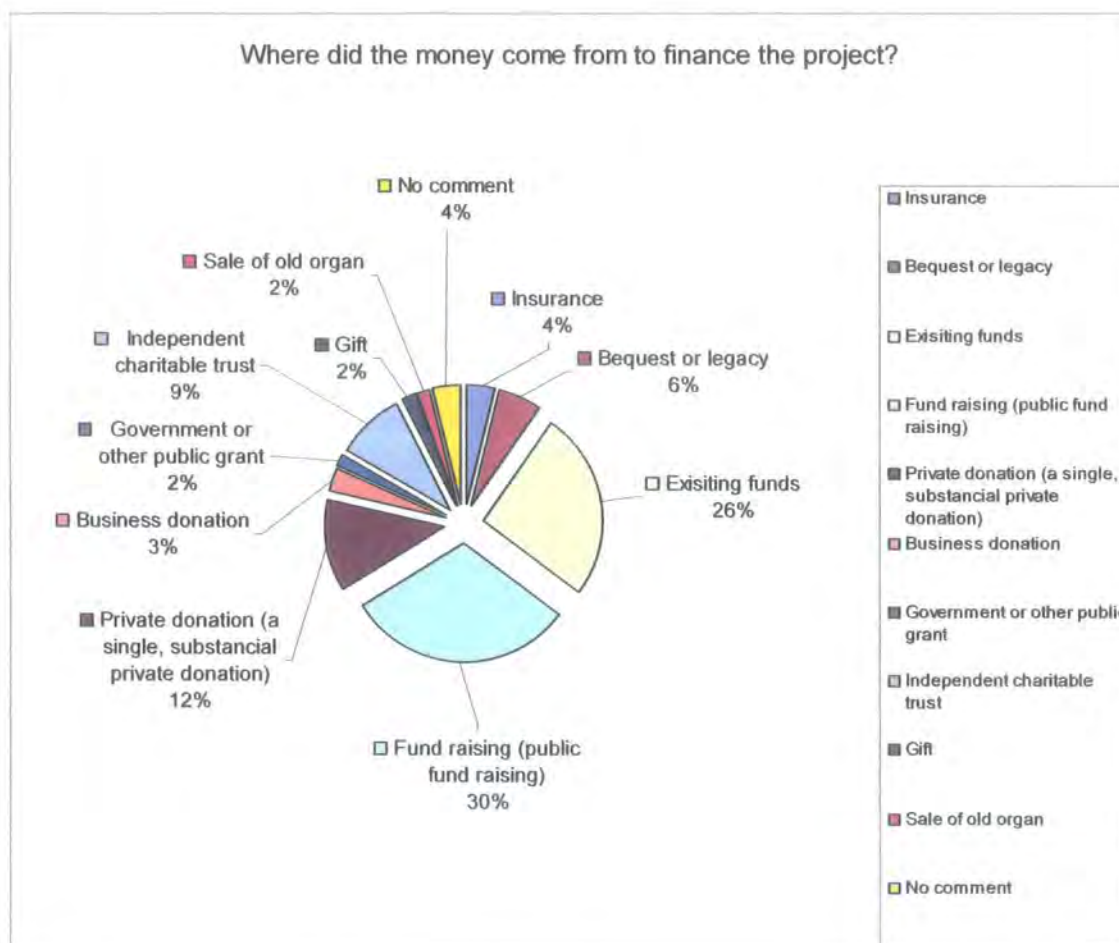


Figure 10.

*Q7. To the best of your knowledge, who was involved in making the key decisions?*

This question was broken down into 8 sub-sections for the ease of respondents (see appendix 1), but primarily to ascertain accurate involvement. From collating the results, sub sections 1 to 7 have been included in Figure 11, which shows who was involved with the project. In sub section 3, *Other* has been replaced by 'Education department', and *Other* in sub section 4 has been replaced by 'Head of Music' which is what the responses universally represented. This set of results is also presented in Figure 12 as a more condensed chart. 'Consultants Paid', 'Advisors Acting in an Unofficial Capacity', 'Roman Catholic Organ Advisory Service', and 'Diocesan Organ Advisor' have been grouped as one under the general heading 'Organ Advisors'. 'Interested Academics' and



‘Head of Music’ have been combined to form the category of ‘Education Department’.

‘Churchwardens’ have been amalgamated with ‘Parochial Church Council’ to form ‘Church Council’. Sub section 8 of question 8, concerning personal involvement, will be shown separately in Figure 13.

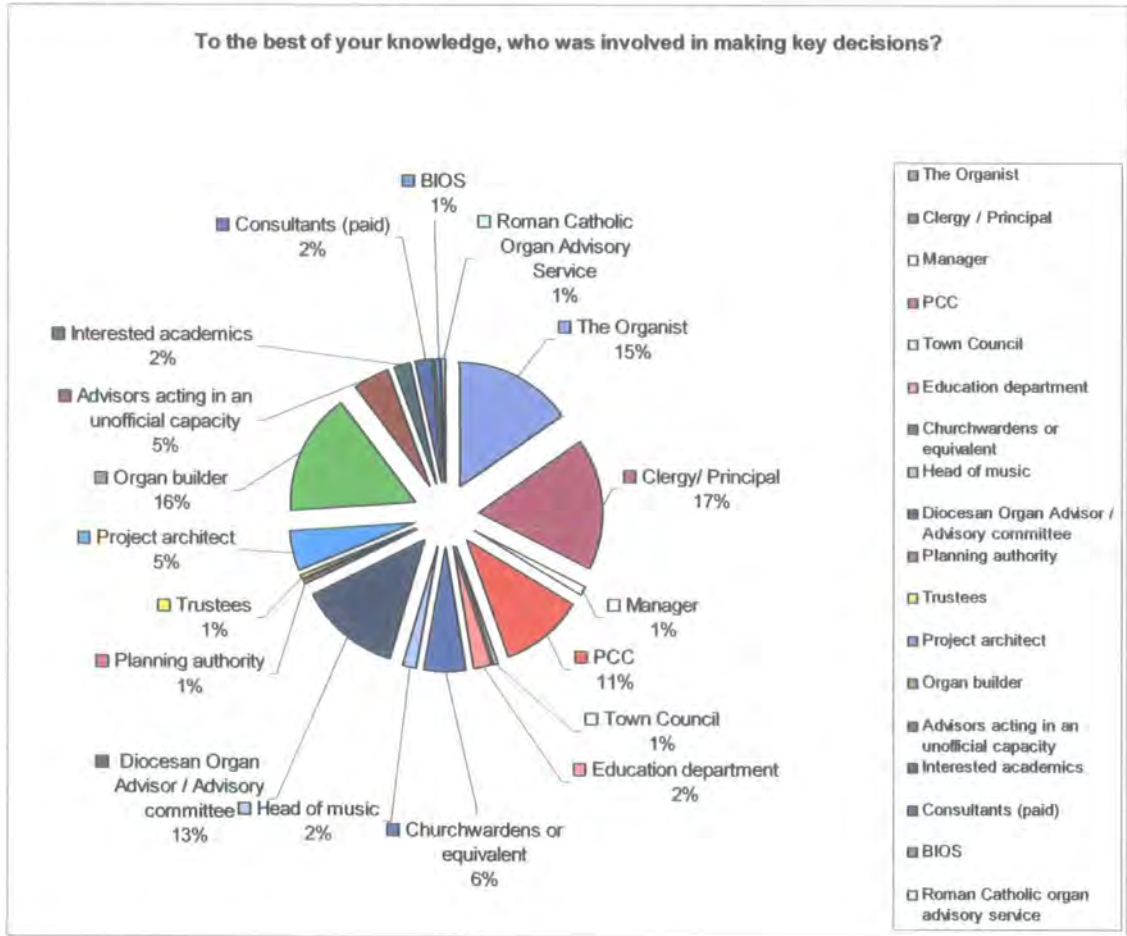


Figure 11.

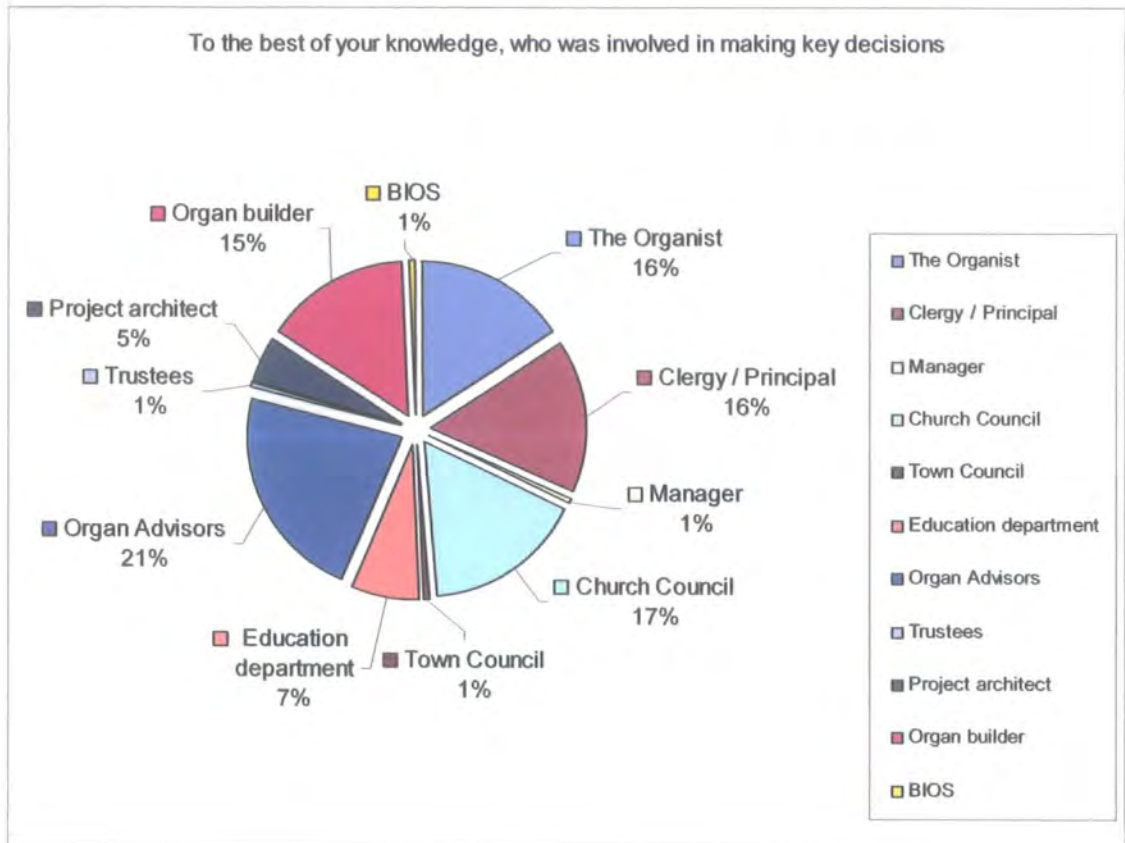


Figure 12.

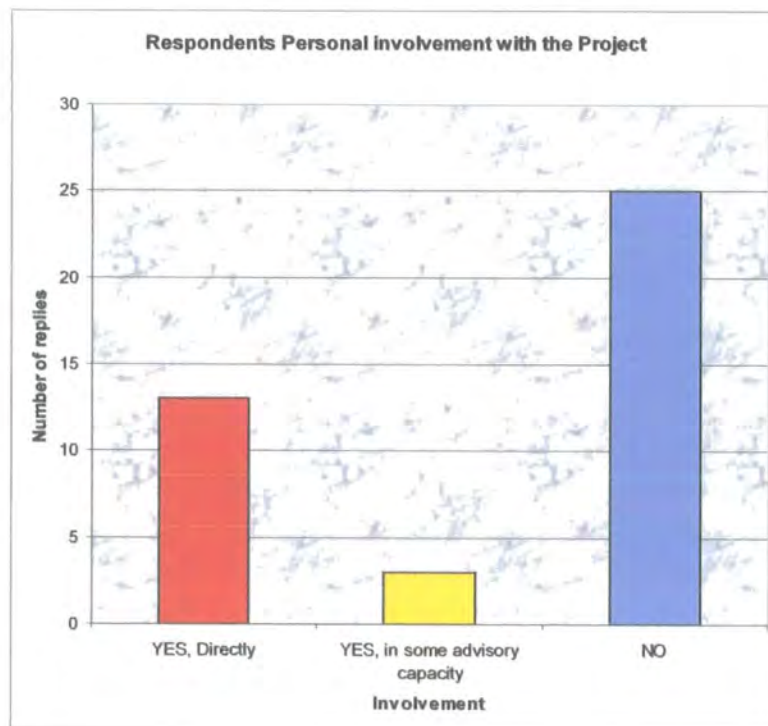


Figure 13.

Q8. What categories of musician were involved at the time of decision making?

The *Other* category has been excluded as none of the respondents found this relevant.

Figure 14 shows the results.

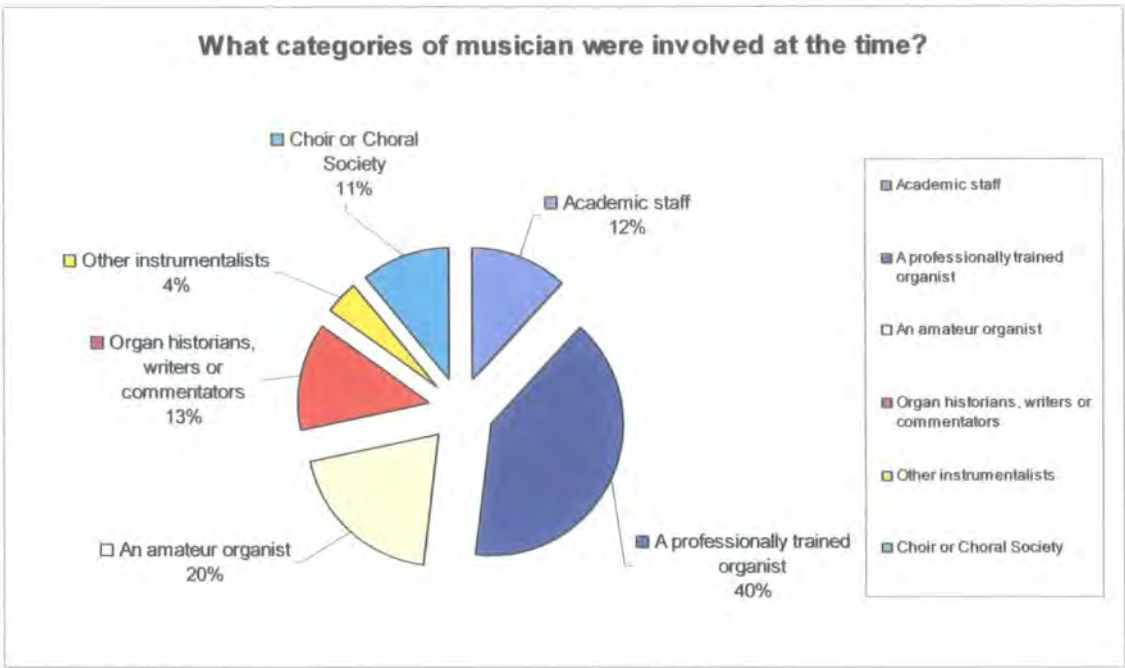


Figure 14.

Q9. Before construction, what were the new instrument's intended primary purpose(s)?

The *Other* category was omitted because of irrelevance. Figure 15 shows the results.

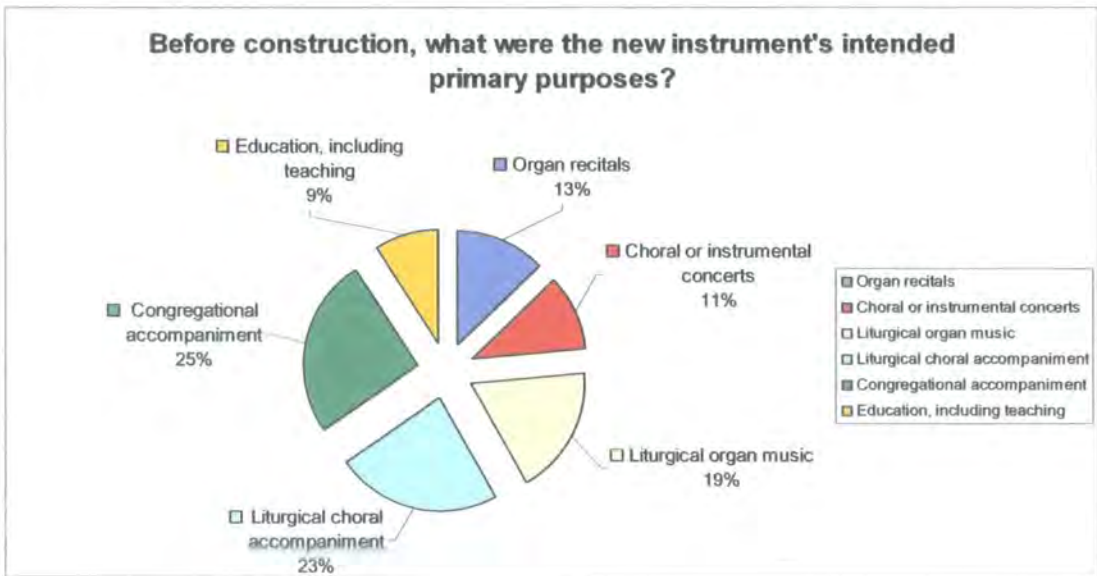


Figure 15.

*Q10. Which organ builder was chosen?*

Figure 16 shows the organ builders chosen and the series illustrates which institution their instruments reside in. This distribution is interesting since it appears to indicate that there were two favoured builders (one in the south and one in the north of England) whereas everyone else was “on trial”. It would be interesting to extend this survey into the period 1990-2000 to see if this pattern continues.

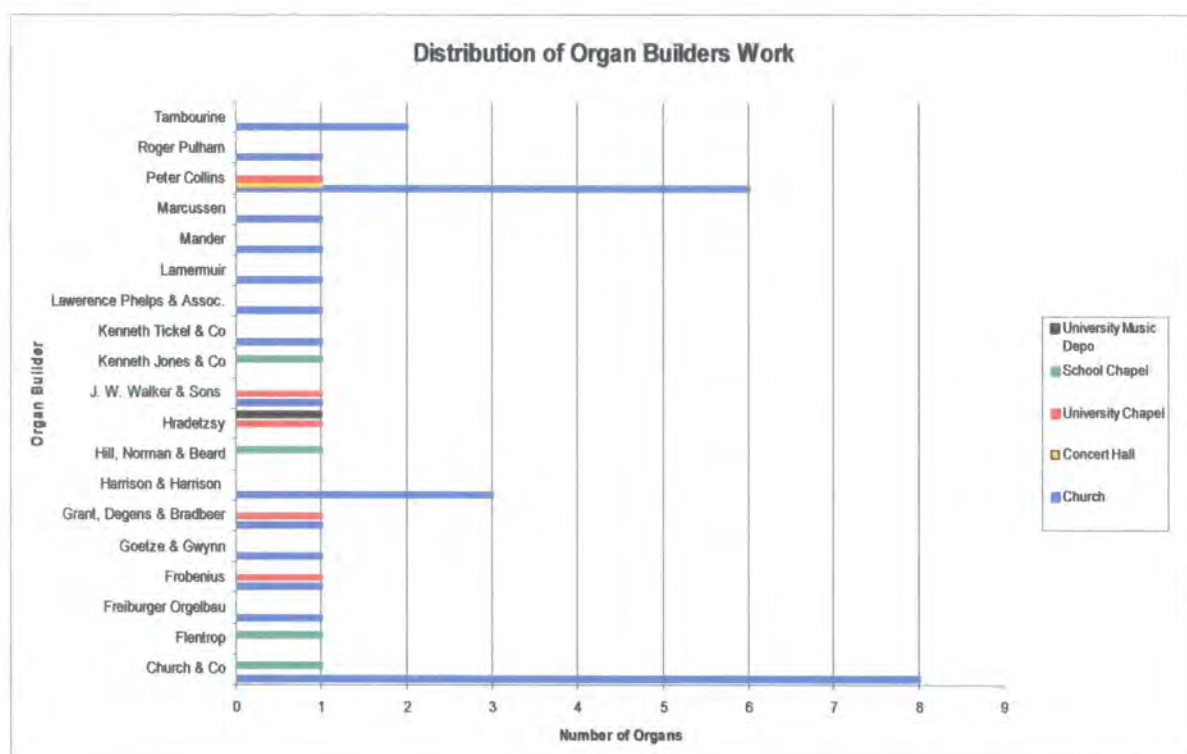


Figure 16.

Q11. Why this builder?

The *Other* section was omitted because of irrelevance. Figure 17 shows the results.

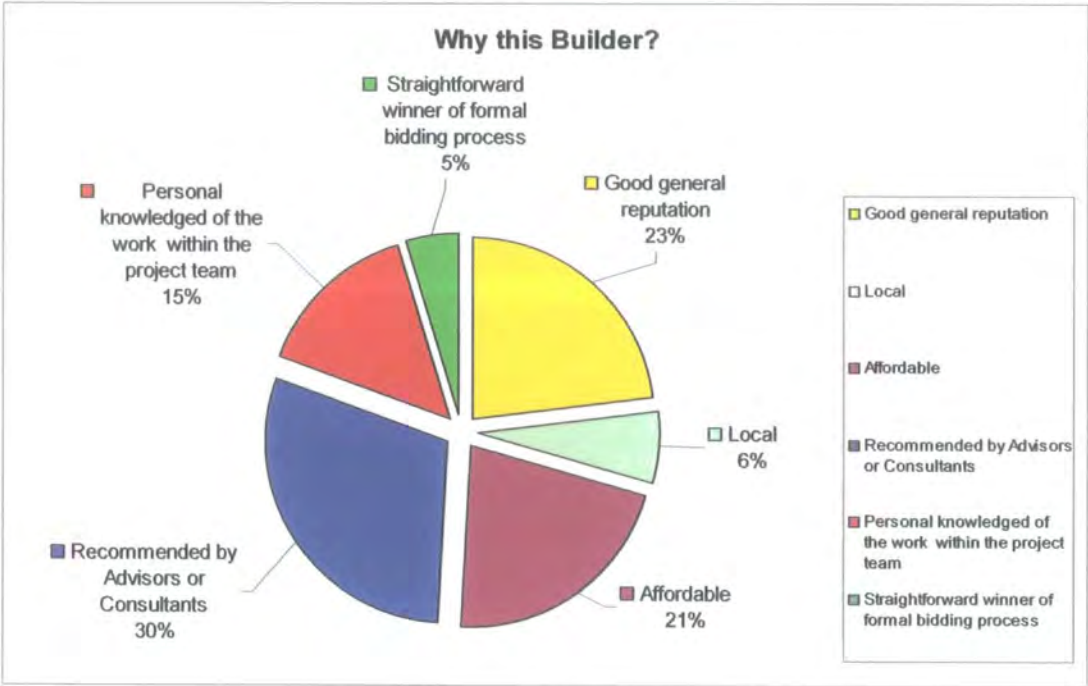


Figure 17.

Q12. Is this the only organ in the building?

Figure 18 shows the results.

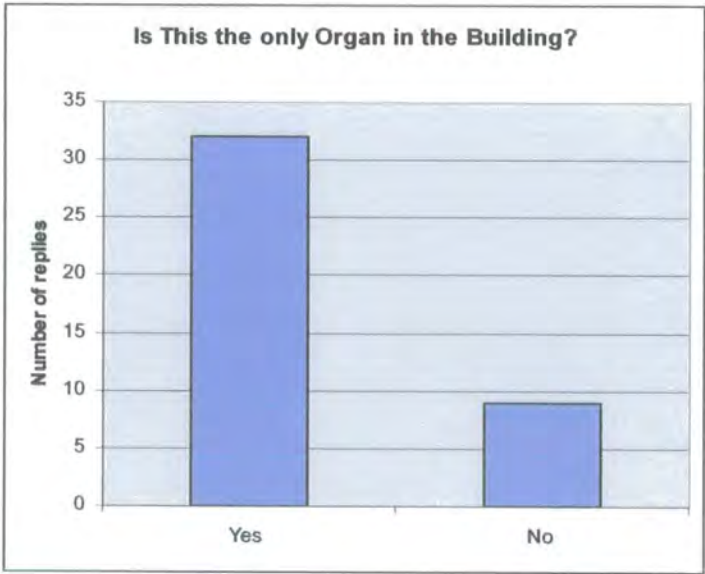


Figure 18.



Q13. a) Referring to your answer(s) to Q9, how well has the instrument fulfilled its originally intended purposes?

Figure 19 shows the results.

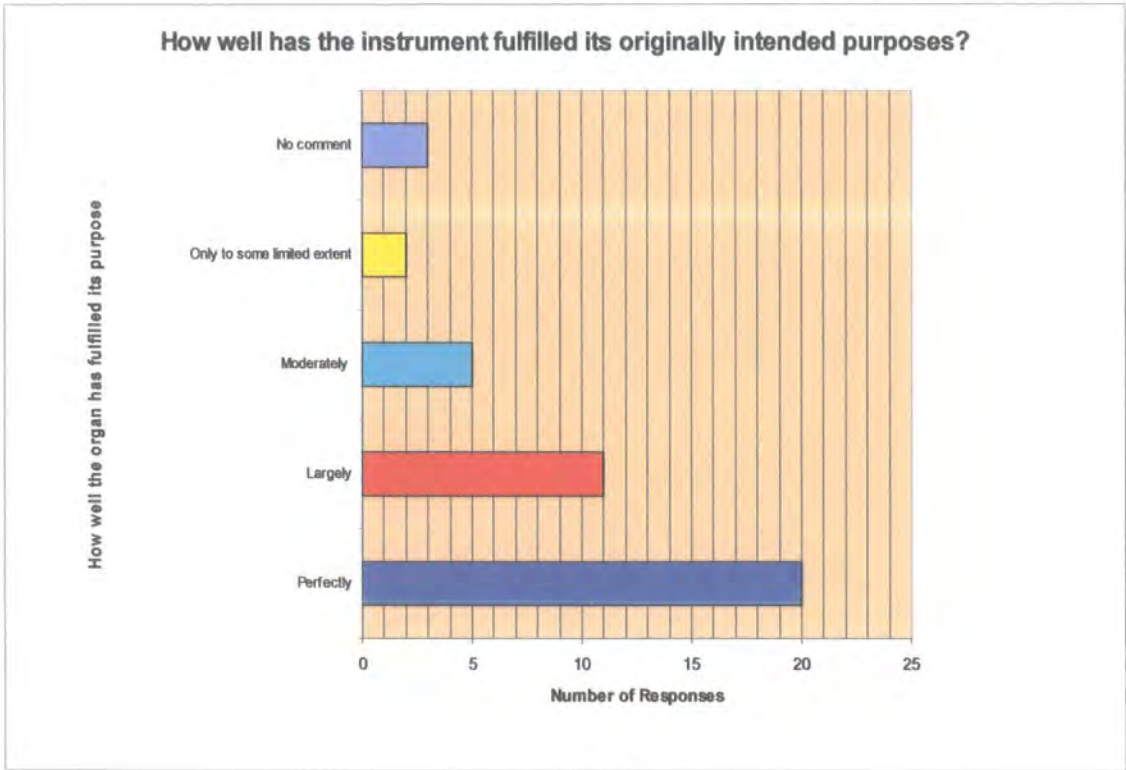


Figure 19.

Q13 b) What are its strengths? & Q13 c) What are its weaknesses?

With these two subsections, respondents were invited to note down, in their own words, their personal views on their instrument. It was too hard to compile a sensible number of reasons, so open questions have been used here. ‘They permit the researcher to obtain answers that were unanticipated. They also may describe more closely the real views of the respondents.’<sup>7</sup> The information from respondents naturally clusters into a number of viewpoints concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the instruments. Having said that, remember that this is my interpretation (which I have had independently

<sup>7</sup> Fowler, F. J. Jr., *Survey Research Methods*. 87.

reviewed).<sup>8</sup> You might wish to make your own interpretation, and I have presented word for word the actual responses in appendix 3 and 4 so you can do this.

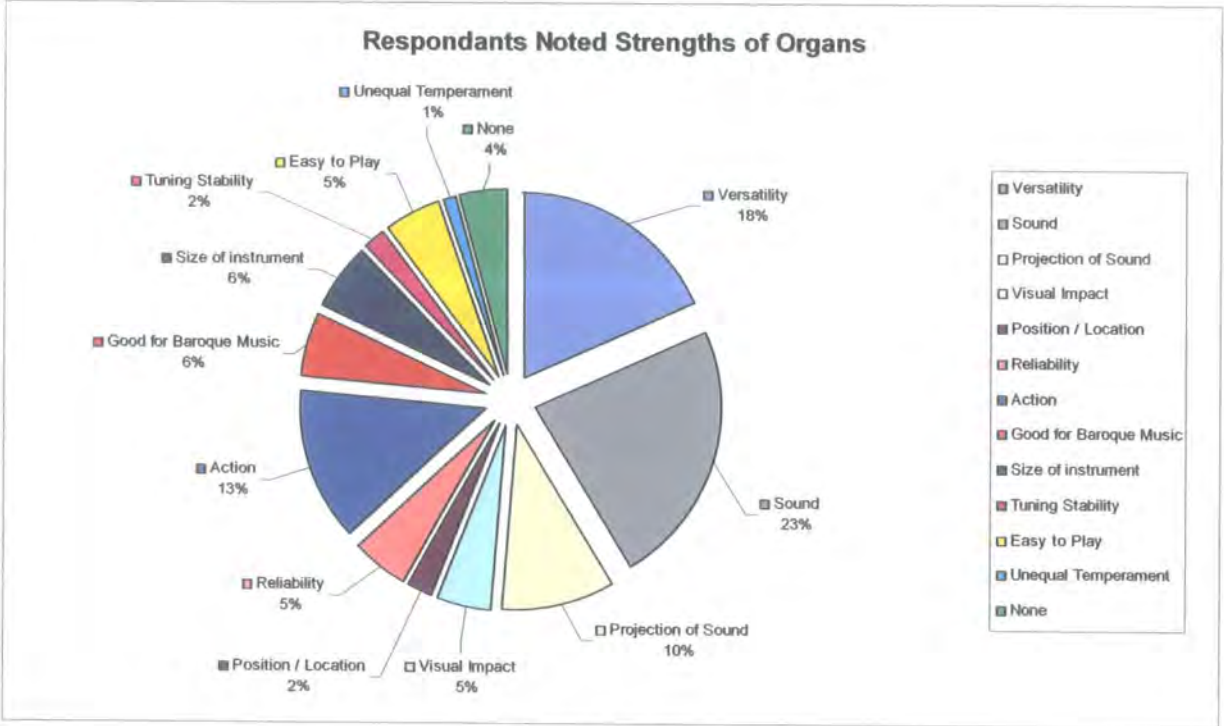


Figure 20.

<sup>8</sup> The survey has been examined by Mr. C. E. L. Hewlett MA (Cantab), MEng (Cantab), CEng, MChemE, DipM, MCIM, FRSA.

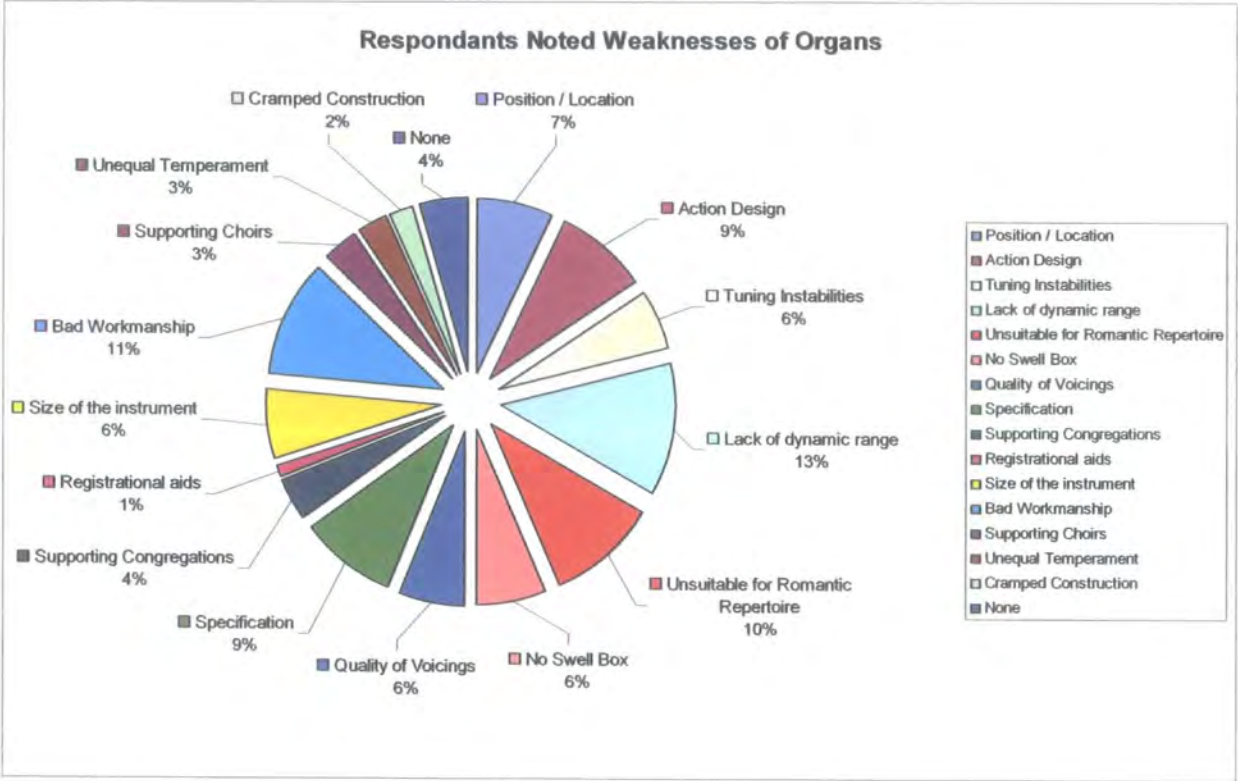


Figure 21.

Q13 d) How reliable has it been?

Figure 22 shows the results.

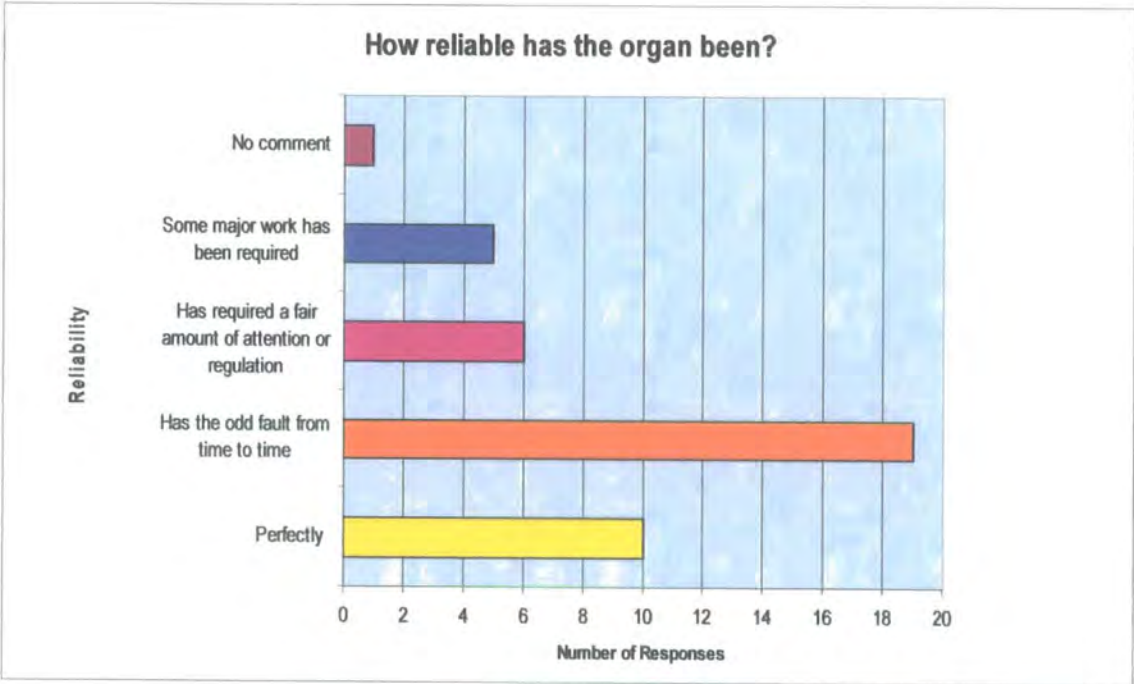


Figure 22.



*Q14. If a redundant instrument of good pedigree, but from a preceding school of organ building (say a Willis or Hill), of about the same size had been available at the time of installation at an equivalent or lower cost, would you have preferred it?*

The results of this question, (see Figure 23), have been split, using question 8 subsection 8, to divide the views of those who were involved with the project from those who were not involved.

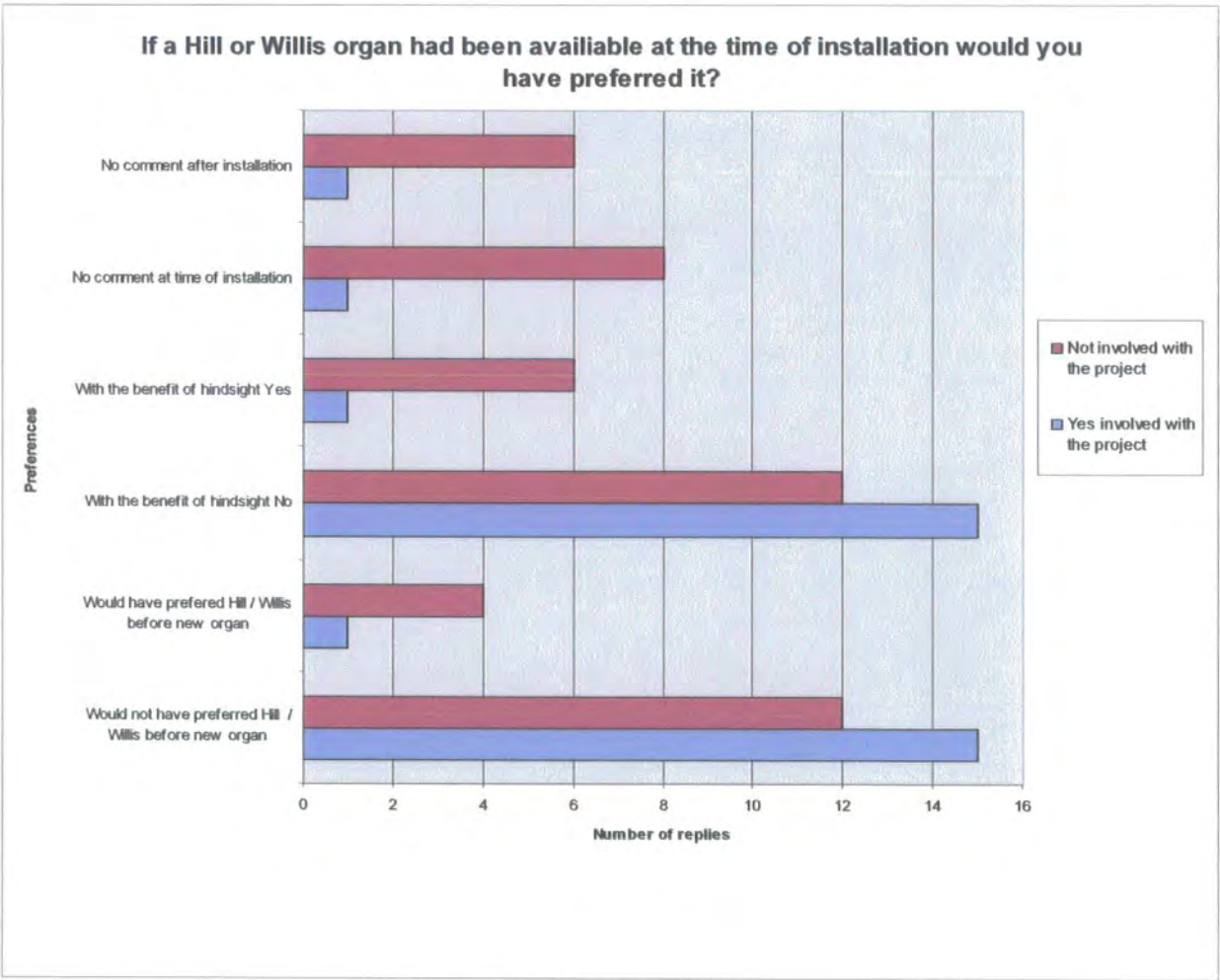


Figure 23.

Q15. In the years to come when this organ needs restoration would you regard it more as:

- a) having great historic value and worthy of preservation without change?
- b) an instrument from a period of experimentation which needs to be updated, improved or replaced?

Figure 24 shows the personal views of the respondents concerning their instrument's preservation.

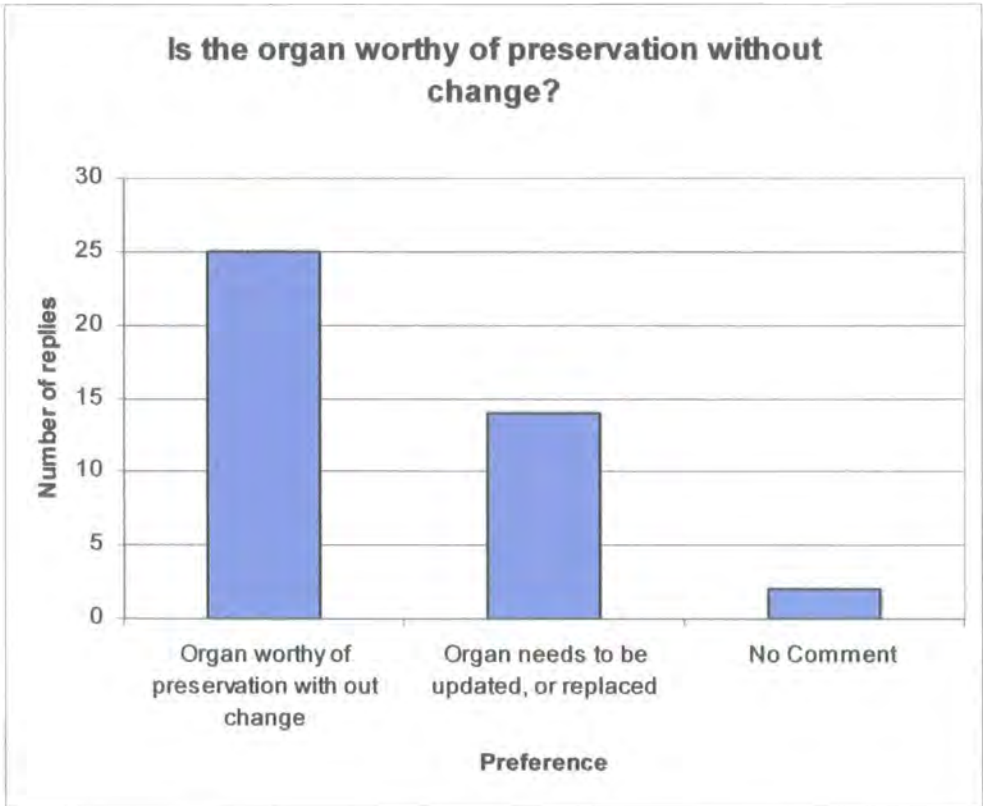


Figure 24.

Figure 25 shows the personal views of respondents, who were involved with the project from the outset, concerning the preservation of their instrument. Figure 26 shows the personal views of respondents concerning preservation, who were not personally involved with the project.

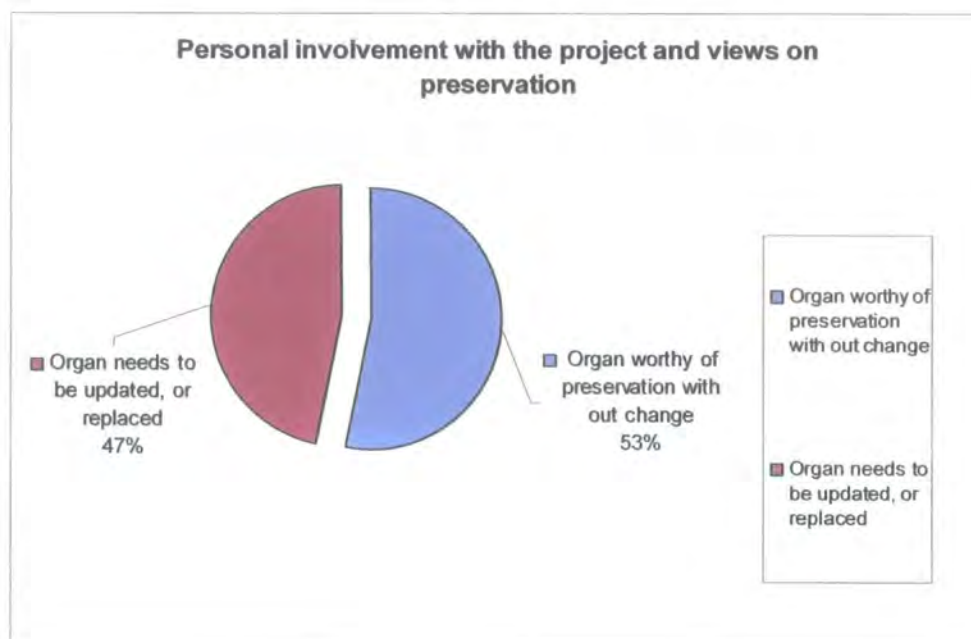


Figure 25.

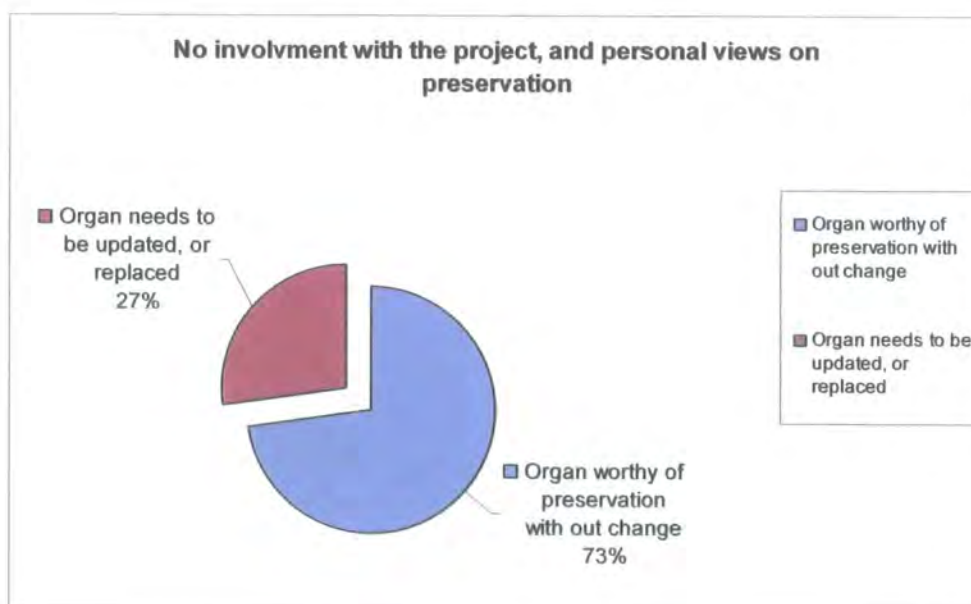


Figure 26.

As the raw data is now presented, the subsequent sub headings will examine aspects of interest that have arisen from the results collected.

### The Trend

If the highest scoring answer from each section of the questionnaire is taken, a hypothetical chronicle can be seen to evolve. In reality this seems to hold much truth and sums up the classical organ revival.

In the beginning: The old instrument in the church was beyond sensible repair to such an extent that when discussing its fate, no other options were considered about its future, except to replace it; a new pipe organ was to be installed. A neo-classical organ was installed because of the desire for authenticity in performance (at least in a school of playing hitherto denied the majority in the UK – baroque music). The new organ was paid for by public fund raising. A redundant Hill or Willis organ of similar size and good pedigree was not a preferred option (because it did not fill the perceived gap). The key decisions for the organ were made by the organ advisors and church council. There was also a professionally trained organist on the scene at the time of installation. The chosen organ builder was recommended by the organ advisors and the primary purpose of the organ was for congregational accompaniment (inconsistent with the main reasoning behind the installation). As the years passed, and the organ is assessed on its success, it is evident that the organ has more-or-less fulfilled its intended purpose. It has had the odd fault from time to time. It is the only organ in the building and its main strength is its sound. In hindsight the present organist is glad of the organ and does not regret not having a Hill or Willis instrument, (but the responses are from people either involved in the project or accepting appointments knowing the instrument in place). They would not change the organ, in many cases believing it to be of great historic

value and worthy of complete preservation. (It is fact that some of the respondents were not resident at their institution when the decisions and installation were being made and taking place. However, as seen, 73% of those not involved from the outset want the organ to remain unaltered in the future.)

### Strengths and Weaknesses

Organists have commented that the main weaknesses of their organ is the lack of dynamic range, bad workmanship, and its unsuitability for romantic repertoire. 33% of respondents said that authenticity in performance was the main reason for the installation of a neo-classical organ. However, when the respondents were asked to state the intended primary purposes of their instrument, congregation accompaniment was first (25%), followed by liturgical choral accompaniment (23%), and then liturgical organ music (19%). This is inconsistent! Note also that organ recitals received only 13%, and education, including teaching, only received 9%. If a neo-classical organ was desired, and indeed installed because of authenticity in performance as a high priority, one would have expected education to be a higher priority than it has been. (I am intrigued to know how one authentically accompanies congregations to Victorian and more modern hymns on neo-classical organs!)

In the noted strengths of instruments, only 6% of respondents specifically commented that the organ was good for baroque music. The 18% who said their instrument was versatile might well have intended their answer to imply that the instrument is good for authentic performances. On the other hand, 10% commented that the instrument was unsuitable for romantic repertoire and 6% commented that the organ did not have a swell box. This could also imply that the organ is good for baroque music. It does, however, show that authenticity in romantic music performance has been sacrificed, but this is to be expected as previously mentioned when the romantic

instrument and repertoire was put-a-side in favour of the baroque instrument and its repertoire.

40% of replies said there was a professionally trained organist on the scene at the time of the project. It is possible that consequently the organist would have had knowledge of the prevailing trends of the day and might have been highly swayed by the neo-classical organ and the influence of The Royal Festival Hall organ. Many professional organists would play the organ music of J. S. Bach with the desire to play such without the thick tones of the romantic organ, in a style, and manner, that was at the forefront of conversation and scholarship.

### Organ Advisors

The results collected from the questionnaire support the claims made by Rowntree and Brennan about organ advisors and influential figures

As might be expected the influence of individuals on the overall pattern are clear, persons such as David Butterworth, Nicholas Danby, Ralph Downes, Peter Hurford, David Lumsden, Richard Marlow, Peter Williams and Donald Wright have all played a part, as have the advisory bodies; the Anglican Organ Advisory Committee and the Roman Catholic Organ Advisory Group of which John Rowntree is secretary, and also the British Institute of Organ Studies which was established in 1976.<sup>9</sup>

Although only 3% of institutions questioned reported that they installed a neo-classical organ largely because it was recommended by the organ advisor, 21% of responses indicated that organ advisors, whether professional or not, were involved with key decision making (see Figure 12) the largest single category. 13% of respondents commented that, in addition, 'organ historians or commentators' were on the scene at the time of the project (see Figure 14). 30% of respondents (highest % in that category) commented that the organ builder was chosen because they were recommended by the organ advisor (see Figure 17). It is also interesting to note that many of these builders were often known purely for neo-classical instruments, such as Nigel Church and Peter

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<sup>9</sup> Rowntree, J. and Brennan, J., *The Classical Organ in Britain Volume 2*. 16.

Collins (these two builders happen to form the largest proportion of organs built responded to in this survey).

#### Case study – re: Organ Advisors

In 1979, a small two manual and pedal organ was installed into the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady and St. Columba, at Wallsend, Northumberland. An article written for *The Organ* in July 1979, by Donald Wright (organ advisor for the North East of England), sheds light on his involvement with the installation.

The article, entitled 'An Experimental Approach to the Building of a New Organ at the Church of Our Lady and St Columba, Wallsend, Northumberland' begins by describing the history of the church building and the fate of the old organ. The old organ at St. Columba's, according to Wright, was not of any historical musical value, 'nor for that matter was musically prepossessing in any way.'<sup>10</sup> Apparently, the old instrument contained a mixture of pipework from several previous instruments, some of which was even reported to have come from a cinema organ. The action was a poor electro-pneumatic system. In September 1976, the church tower, which housed the organ, was flooded and the organ rendered unplayable. The parish Priest, at the time, sought advice from The Roman Catholic Organ Advisory Group on the best way forward. The Group duly visited the church to examine the old instrument and:

rapidly reached the conclusion that the damage to the organ was of such a magnitude that the only treatment possible would be that of a complete and expensive reconstruction...The Group recommended therefore that an investment be made instead in a completely new smaller organ with mechanical action designed specially for the needs of the church.<sup>11</sup>

The church and Priest took into consideration the reports and advice given by the Group and accepted it. They allowed The Group to progress with the designing and preparation of a new instrument. This was the first instrument in the North of England to be

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10 Wright, D., 'An Experimental Approach to the Building of a New Organ at the Church of Our Lady and St. Columba, Wallsend, Northumberland'. *The Organ*. (Jul 1979), 2.

11 Ibid., 3.

influenced by The Roman Catholic Organ Advisory Group. From Wright's article, it is evident that the Group were hugely excited by such an opportunity and wanted to do the best job they could.

The Group decided to undertake a bold experiment, which at the time was unique to this country. They enlisted international organ consultant George Lhôte of Geneva to 'plan the exercise, to be responsible for the design of the instrument, and to direct the tonal finishing.'<sup>12</sup> The Group were delighted at this collaboration and equally delighted when the organ builder Nigel Church of Stamfordham (located between Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Hexham) agreed to build the organ. Wright comments that 'it seemed obvious and practical to involve a local craftsman for this project.'<sup>13</sup> However, when referring to the questionnaire response from St. Columba's it is stated that the reason Nigel Church was chosen to build the organ was because he was 'affordable' and 'recommended by the Advisors'; no mention was made to the fact that he was local.<sup>14</sup>

In the next section of the article, Wright discusses Lhôte's visit to St. Columba's to work on the designs and dimensions of the instrument. However, what causes concern is not the thought and effort that clearly was expended on the instrument, but the end result. The article leads one to expect the result to be a small instrument with an exceptional specification. In fact, the specification causes one to be somewhat bemused when it is compared to numerous other, small, successful specifications. In the questionnaire reply from St. Columba's, the intended purposes of the organ were named as 'congregational accompaniment', 'liturgical organ music', and 'choral accompaniment'. This instrument's specification is quite small, and this, according to Wright was because it 'depended on the amount of money which ... remained available

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Questionnaire response from St. Columba's RC Church, Wallsend. 03/03/04.



to the whole scheme.’<sup>15</sup> It is also acknowledged by Wright that ‘there was no need for a swell organ. It was not really necessary as the principle function of the instrument was that of supplying accompaniment for a responsorial liturgy – and it could not be afforded anyway.’<sup>16</sup> (One speculates whether Lhôte’s fee was so large that the church had to forgo a larger specification to be able to cover his fee and travelling expenses. This, of course is not mentioned in the article, nor in the questionnaire reply from St. Columba’s, but it does make one wonder.)

When examining the specification of this instrument it is interesting to note that the choir organ is played from the upper manual and not the lower as would be the normal practice with any typical German or English instrument. The specification for the instrument at St. Columba’s is as follows

Manual I - Great	Manual II – Choir	Pedal
Principal 8	Gedackt 8	Subbass 16
Octave 4	Chimney Flute 4	Open Flute 8
Fifteenth 2	Flute 2	Trumpet 8
Nineteenth 1 ⅓	Nazard 2 ⅔	
Mixture (22.26) II	Tierce 1 ⅔	<i>Couplers I/Pedal; II/Pedal; II/I</i>

Wright acknowledges in his article that this specification was decided upon and agreed by all.<sup>17</sup> However, no individual can be held responsible for its rather eccentric outlook. What should be questioned is the use of an 8ft’ trumpet on the pedal as the only reed on the whole instrument. Is the organist supposed to play hymn melodies with the feet? Without actually playing the instrument, and basing ones assumption on past experience, there seems no doubt to the fact that the trumpet would have been better placed on the great or choir organ to form a chorus reed. If, for example, the pedal reed had been at 16ft’ pitch, then this would be much more versatile and musically

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15 Wright, D., ‘An Experimental Approach to the Building of a New Organ at the Church of Our Lady and St. Columba, Wallsend, Northumberland’. 4.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

acceptable. Such is the case in Oxford with the one manual and pedal instrument at the church of St. John the Evangelist. This instrument has no manual reeds, but has a 16ft' reed on the pedal.<sup>18</sup> At St Columba's, it would have added gravitas to the instrument: something Bach favoured. When Bach was organist at St. Blasius's Church, Mühlhausen between 1707-1708, it is known that he replaced the 8ft' trumpet on the upper manual with a fagotto at 16ft' pitch, which he believed sounded much finer and would be of greater use.<sup>19</sup> If one had to redesign the specification of this instrument with the same number of registers, a more sensible solution could be as follows:

Manual I - Great	Manual II - Choir	Pedal
Principal 8	Gedackt 8	Subbass 16
Stopped Flute 8	Chimney Flute 4	Open Flute 8
Octave 4	Flute 2	Fagotto 16
Fifteenth 2	Tierce 1 3/5	
Mixture (22.26) II	Trumpet 8	<i>Couplers I/Pedal; II/Pedal; II/I</i>

This hypothetical specification does not enlarge the instrument, as all stops, apart from the pedal, are on the same wind-chest. However, if one replaced the great nineteenth 1 1/3ft' with a stopped flute 8ft' it would allow the flute ranks on the choir to be used for solo work or as a hybrid *cornet* without having to be accompanied by the great 8ft' principal. A trumpet 8ft' on the choir manual in place of the nazard 2 2/3ft' would enable it to be use as a solo reed against the great organ or as a chorus reed when the manuals are coupled together.

Wright comments favourably about the tonality of the organ with phrases such as 'The gentle singing quality pays tribute to its essential musicality' and 'it is an instrument of the highest integrity.'<sup>20</sup> In considering what Wright has said, it is important to realise that he was one of the key people in the design of this instrument

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18 Pacey, R. & Popkin, M., *The Organs of Oxford*. 102.

19 David, H. T. & Mendal, A., *The New Bach Reader, The Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in letters and documents*. 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, 54-7.

20 Wright, D., 'An Experimental Approach to the Building of a New Organ at the Church of Our Lady and St. Columba, Wallsend, Northumberland'. 5.

and it is perhaps not surprising that he has high praise for the instrument. Richard Hird writes 'Trying to describe the sound is difficult, because it is just so perfectly exquisite.'<sup>21</sup> Wright does ask the question, 'How does one describe any organ tonally?' To answer this question, the response given by the present day organist at St. Columba's in the questionnaire section regarding instrument weaknesses is most telling. '(I have) never really liked this type of organ. Does not have any "Real Bass" or a decent stop registration for "traditional" organ music.'<sup>22</sup> Wright ends his article by saying that 'it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this bold experiment has been crowned with success.'<sup>23</sup> Again, Wright has commented on the organ at the time of construction and is playing judge and jury on his own instrument. As almost thirty years has passed since the instrument was constructed, is it not time for this and many other neo-classical instruments to be reassessed objectively?

Unsurprisingly, with the present situation, it is difficult to support Wright's conclusion, specifically when the present organist, who has to play the said organ week in week out, is not creating the impression that the instrument is crowned with such success. If the current organist just happened to have a particular interest in baroque music, one may have found the results much different, but of course there are differences in opinions and attitudes do change over the course of time. (In addition, it has been noted that a Hill or Willis organ *would* have been preferred in place of the Nigel Church organ, both at the time of installation, and also in hindsight.) After the exciting prospect and permission to design a new organ, the first for The Group in the North of England did The Group actually sweep under the carpet the real needs of the church and become blinded and carried away by their own ideals and the excitement of

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21 Pipe Organs of Durham and the North East. [www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.hirdneworgans/oswalds.htm](http://www.dur.ac.uk/r.d.hirdneworgans/oswalds.htm) (accessed 20/10/03).

22 Questionnaire response from St. Columba's RC Church, Wallsend. 03/03/04.

23 Wright, D., 'An Experimental Approach to the Building of a New Organ at the Church of Our Lady and St. Columba, Wallsend, Northumberland'. 5-6.

this unique collaboration. There are several unanswered questions here: Why was the project carried out so far from The Group based in the south of England where they are not easily accessible to play the instrument and be on hand to witness its success? Was it conveniently away from critical comment that an equivalent project in the Capital might have attracted?

### Action

One of the undoubted successes of the classical organ revival was the reintroduction and redesign of mechanical key action.<sup>24</sup> As previously commented upon, this has, over the last couple of decades enhanced playing styles and re-established a more intimate link between the player and his instrument. In response to the questionnaire where respondents were asked to note the strengths of their instrument, many favourable comments were noted in favour of mechanical key action; these included

Sensitive touch

Mechanically excellence

Use of suspended tracker action

Responsive mechanical action

From Figure 20, it is seen that 'Action' ranked third out of thirteen in the noted strengths. This can certainly support the claims made by organists and commentators, such as Bicknell, Hale, Williams, and Norman who favour such an action. However, there were 9% of respondents who commented that one weakness of their instrument was the quality of the action. This can be linked to poor workmanship. The noted comment concerning 'poor action', if combined with 'cramped construction', 'tuning instabilities', 'quality of voicings' and 'bad workmanship', as is shown in Figure 21,

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<sup>24</sup> Very little has been commented on mechanical verses electrical stop action and therefore this aspect shall be left alone. It is known that some of the instruments questioned contain electric stop action and mechanical key action such as the Grant Degens & Bradbeer organs at York University and New College Oxford and the Lawrence Phelps organ at Hexham Abbey.

together totals 47% of respondents (highest score) making the point that bad workmanship is the prime weakness of their instrument. For example, the instrument built for St. David's Hall Cardiff between 1979 – 1982, by Peter Collins, had, in 1992 (just ten years after completion) to have all the key and pedal actions completely redesigned and replaced because of bad workmanship. Since 1992 the organ has been perfectly reliable according to the questionnaire reply from the organ's curator at St. David's Hall. Yet, the curator does comment that there is still an inconsistency in the key actions between the depths and individual keyboards.<sup>25</sup> In the December 2003 edition of the IBO Journal Newsletter, Barry Williams wrote, when arguing over the cost of pipe organs and electronic organs, that:

...there are some electronics [electronic organs] still working from the 1950s – which is more than can be said for certain neo-classical tracker organs that have had replacement tracker actions fitted in less than thirty years.<sup>26</sup>

Reliability, no doubt, is connected in some respect with key action design. In the noted strengths, it is seen that only 5% single out 'reliability' as a main strength. From Figure 22 it is seen that only 10 organs (out of 41) have been perfectly reliable. Interesting though is that just under half of the organs questioned (19 out of 41) have had the odd fault from time to time, but nothing too severe. However, it is seen that no response is made directly to reliability, but whether this could be linked with the 47% noting bad workmanship is open to interpretation and with the limited information received, it is difficult to give a precise picture.

Figure 27 shows the life span (to-date) of each of the instruments included in the questionnaire. When respondents noted their instruments last major overhaul, some have misinterpreted the implications of this question and have included annual tunings. It is presumed that 'general overhaul' implies work to the key and stop action. It is very

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25 Questionnaire response from the Curator of St. David's Hall Cardiff, Wales, received February 2004.

26 Williams, B., 'Letters – lies, damned lies, and digital costs'. Letters to the editor. *IBO Journal* Newsletter, No. 32, (Dec 03), 11.

Church / Institution	Conceived	first played	Organ builder	Last major overhaul	Life span up to 1st overhaul	Next major overhaul
The London Oratory	1950	1952	J. W. Walker	1985	33	2004
Workshop Priory	1972	1974	Peter Collins	1996	22	Not known
St. David's Hall, Cardiff	1979	1982	Peter Collins	1992	10	Not known
St. Catherine's Barmby Moor	1980	1983	Roger Pulham	Not stated, but PPO did some technical work		Not known
Hexham Abbey	1972	1974	Lawrence Phelps	1998 + 1999	14	2025?
St. Peter's Dunchurch	1964	1971	GDB	Not needed just twice yearly tune	33+	
St. Andrew's Salvator's Chapel	1970	1974	Hradetzky	2000	26	2017
St. Andrew's St. Leonard's Chapel	1993	1994	J. W. Walker	N/A	20+	2011
Carmelite Convent, Darlington	1988	1990	Kenneth Tickel	2003	13	Not known
School of St. David & St. Katherine	1974	1976	HN&B	1996	20	2021
St. John Baptist, Marldon, Devon	1988	1990	Goetze & Gwynne	Not stated, but has required fair amount of attention		
St. Mary Stoke D'Abernon	1973	1975	Frobenious	1998	23	2018
St. Mary RC Cathedral, Newcastle	1979	1981	Church & Co	1988 (after a fire)	7	Not known
St. Mary's Nottingham	1969	1973	Marcussen	1993	20	pending church refurbishment
Royal Northern College of Music	1970	1971	Hradetzky	1993	22	2005
West Ham Parish Church	1983	1986	H&H	2003	17	Not known
All Saints RC Lanchester	1984	1985	H&H	Not - tuned and adjusted annually	19+	Not known
St. Robert's RC Fenham	1979	1980	H&H	Not	24+	Not known
Aston Tirrold URC	1978	1980	Church & Co	1989	9	Not known
St. Mark's Marske	1974	1975	Church & Co	1998	23	Not known
St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich	1979	1984	Peter Collins	Not	20+	2007-9?
Lorretto School	(1980s) 1987	1988	Kenneth Jones	Not	15+	Not known
St. James RC Reading	1974	1976	Tambourine	Not	28+	Near future
Our Lady, Blackheath, London	1977	1978	Freiburger Orgelbau	2002	24	2007
All Saints Hutton Rudby	1973	1974	Peter Collins	Not	30+	Not known
Eton College	1972	1973	Flentrop	Not	31+	2005
St. Peter's, Berhamsted, Herts	1983	1986	Peter Collins	Not	18+	Not yet needed, tuned annually
Greyfriars, Edinburgh	1985	1990	Peter Collins	2003/4	13/14	Not known
St. Vincent's RC, Altrincham	1980s?	1986	Lamermuir	Not	18	Not known
Holy Cross, Fenham	1979	1981	Church & Co	2003	22	Not known, but annual tune etc
St. George & Teresa, Dorridge	1970s?	1977	Tambourine	2000	27	Not known
Our Lady and St Philip - Sydenham	1970s?	1977	Mander	Not	27	Not known
Our Lady & St. Columba, Wallsend	1978	1979	Church & Co	1996	17	Not known
New College Oxford	1960s?	1969	GDB	1986?	17	Not known
Brasenose College	1970	1973	Peter Collins	2001	28	Not known
The Queen's College Oxford	1962	1965	Frobenious	1990	25	Not known
Sedbergh School	1992	1993	Church & Co	Not	11	Not known
Redmarshall Church	1986	1989	Church & Co	Not	15	2005
St. Michael's, Coxwold	1970s?	1978	Church & Co	Not	26	Not known
St. Albans, RC, Macclesfield	1803	1983	Church & Co	2004	21	2005?
St. Oswald's, Durham	1984	1988	Peter Collins	Not	16+	Not known

Life Span of Instruments

Figure 27

interesting to note that The London Oratory organ, the only instrument with electric action, has managed to survive three years longer than any instrument questioned with mechanical action before the first overhaul. Does this prove that electric action is not as unreliable as it has been preached? The Oratory instrument is being overhauled between July to December 2004, but from the recent discussions held with Prof. Patrick Russill, the director of music at The London Oratory, it was noted that the organ would be cleaned by division enabling parts of the instrument to remain playing. Nothing was mentioned concerning the action, and when playing the said organ, the action appeared to be in very good condition.<sup>27</sup>

As seen from Figure 27, a number of the instruments are still performing successfully since installation without as yet having needed to be overhauled. These include instruments such as St. Peter's Dunchurch, Rugby (Grant Degens & Bradbeer organ; 33 years, no overhaul planned), Eton College (Flentrop organ; 31 years, overhaul planned for 2005), St. James's RC Church, Reading (Tambourine organ; 28 years, overhaul planned for near future) and St. Robert's RC Church, Fenham (Harrison & Harrison organ; 24 years, no overhaul planned).

In the second of his six articles written for *Choir & Organ* titled 'Is the future all mechanical?', Bicknell comments that a small organ of one or two manuals with mechanical action is demonstrably reliable. He comments that three hundred years is really a possibility for the durability of such an action.<sup>28</sup> However, he fails to comment whether this is without the action needing attention, or whether the action has had to be remade after ten or twenty years as has happened at St. David's Hall, Cardiff, and Hexham Abbey. Can Bicknell really mean three hundred years? Surely the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century instruments have not survived to this day without

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27 Personal visitation and discussion with Prof. P. Russill at The London Oratory on 07/05/04.

28 Bicknell, S., 'Is the future all mechanical?' *Organs and organ-building in Britain today*. No. 2 of 6 articles [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.2.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.2.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 2.

affectionate restoration? It is known that builders such as Marcussen learnt their skill and expertise from restoring historic instruments, and were able to produce instruments with fine mechanical action because of such. Phelps remarks that:

Through the critical observation of the results of the tonal work done by his firm [Marcussen] in the restoration of old mechanical-action instruments with slider chests, Zachariassen became convinced of the musical superiority of this mode of construction.<sup>29</sup>

If Bicknell is confident to state 'three hundred years' as a realistic life span, then surely this will be the case for any variety of key action, providing that it is well cared for, and restored, if, and when, needed. The reason why pneumatic, electro-pneumatic, and direct electric actions have not fallen into this category is partly because they have not existed for three hundred years, and partly because only now are builders becoming to appreciate their theory. (This argument concerning durability can be paralleled to the anecdote told about a local gardener who had had the same broom for sixty years, even though it had had five new handles and seven new heads all at different intervals during its life span.)

### Finance

In this section, I do not want to delve into great financial figures, as firstly this would go way beyond this work, and secondly, because I am not fluent in accountancy and finance. However, it is of interest to note some of the points which have come to the surface from the questionnaire replies.

Organs are expensive instruments and much labour and materials go into producing such. Only one of the forty-one respondents gave the full cost of their instrument, as it was not a specific requirement of the survey. However, it does show that in 1984 a two manual and pedal instrument with six speaking stops and three

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29 Phelps, L., *A Short History of the Organ Revival*. Church Music Biannual, Missouri, 1967, <http://www.lawrencephelps.com> (accessed 18/11/03), 5.



couplers cost £17,000 from Harrison & Harrison. If this is taken as a roundabout figure for small organs (could be slightly less for the same size by a less-prominent builder) and say it is doubled for a medium sized two manual and pedal instrument, it is a big out-lay for a musical instrument that may only get played once or twice a week.

From the results (see Figure 10) it is shown that 30% of the money for organ projects came from public fundraising (the highest scoring category in that question). This means the money has originally belonged to some one else, and has been donated in good faith in order to better the church (or institution). Undoubtedly, much of the time given up to raise money for the organ will have taken the form of fairs, fates, cake stalls, concerts, coffee mornings, and general asking. In respect of existing funds, we see that only one Anglican Church was able to use existing funds to pay for their new instrument, whilst six Roman Catholic Churches and six Educational Institutions (with includes all the Oxford Colleges questioned) were able to use existing funds to pay for most, if not all, of the instrument. However, in the Anglican Church it is seen that three churches were able to finance their new organ by private donation and legacy, whereas none of the Roman Catholic churches could.

## *Chapter Seven*

### Was it worth all the effort?

As seen from the results of the survey, it has shown that amongst those questioned, there is a general leaning towards favouring the neo-classical organ (See Figure 24 of chapter 6). However, such views are from a small percentage of players, and as shown in preceding chapters, and as shall be drawn upon in this chapter, in the wider field of music (concerning musicians and listeners), the neo-classical organ is less favoured. Bicknell claims that 'in the same period we have perhaps neglected to consider the position of the audience.'<sup>1</sup>

It would be fair to say that on the whole instruments have been considered and conceived from the builders and players point of view, with key action design and appropriate repertoire at the forefront. It has been witnessed, that people who had written critically about the neo-classical organ were ridiculed, dismissed, and pigeonholed as 'ignorant' and 'insular' by the advocates. These critics nevertheless, were the listening audience, and one can only presume that these are the people Bicknell is referring to as having been neglected. It is beginning to show that these critics may well have been right all along. From the varying personal discussions, concerning neo-classical organs, held and contributed to over the last year with many organists and non, (including members from The Newcastle District Society of Organists and The Durham and Newcastle Association of Bell Ringers) rarely has a positive comment regarding the sound of the neo-classical organ been aired; specifically towards the instruments in the County Durham, Sunderland, and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne area. Amongst the informal discussions held, mechanical key action has again been commended for its

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<sup>1</sup> Bicknell, S., 'Baby or Bathwater? Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. *No.5 of 6 articles published in Choir & Organ in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'*. [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.5.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.5.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 1.

responsiveness. Nevertheless, the sound has always been at the forefront of conversation, and many gave the impression of being happy to sacrifice a fine mechanical action over an exciting and fine sounding instrument with a lesser action. It appears to be a common occurrence amongst those questioned, that they had been led to believe, by the such favourable comments spoken and written about such organs in the stages of their construction, that the neo-classical instruments with fine mechanical actions were to be the best organs yet. However, when finally hearing these instruments in the flesh, the general opinion was far from positive, and overall, the sound of Willis, Lewis, and Arthur Harrison or even something on the lines of Copeman-Hart and Makin digital was much preferred. Maybe such views are narrow, specifically in an area which is largely dominated by Harrison & Harrison instruments and other well known romantic builders; is this to be expected?<sup>2</sup> I think not, because there is also a fair share of neo-classical instruments in the area by builders such as Nigel Church, Peter Collins, Lawrence Phelps, Goetze & Gwynn, and Mander which are readily accessible to hear. It is probable that this is one of the reasons why Bicknell questions the position of the audience, because if audiences had actually been taken notice of when airing points of concern, maybe none of the neo-classical organs would have been built.

It is important to remember (see chapter five) that the listeners are subjected to these instruments in solo and liturgical music. 'In the 1950s and 1960s the classical revival was perhaps concerned mostly with matters of design and mechanics.'<sup>3</sup> Here Bicknell is implying that tonal qualities of the organ were pushed under the carpet in

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2 Instruments such as the four manual Willis/Harrison organ in Durham Cathedral, the 3 manual Willis organ in St. George's Gateshead and St. Dominic's Priory Newcastle, the three manual Lewis organ in St. Hilda's South Shields and two manual Lewis organ in St. George's Cullercoats, the four manual Lewis/Harrison/Nicholson organ in Newcastle Cathedral, the four manual Harrison & Harrison organ in Newcastle City Hall, the three manual Binns/Harrison & Harrison organ in St. Andrew's Newcastle, the three manual Lewis/Harrison & Harrison organ in Sunderland Minster, the three manual Nelson/Willis organ in St. Gabriel's Sunderland and the three manual H. S. Vincent organ in St. Ignatius, Hendon, Sunderland.

3 Bicknell, S., 'Bach or Bauhaus? Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. *No.4 of 6 articles published in Choir & Organ in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'*. [www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.4.htm](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~oneskull/3.5.4.htm) (accessed 16/10/03), 4

favour of mechanical developments. From the personal experiences encountered playing many neo-classical organs of not just of the 1960s, but also of the 1970s, and 1980s over the last year, there is much truth in Bicknell's statement. The sound of many instruments played, have been, more often than not, far from pleasant for any great length of time, but all having a fine mechanical action.<sup>4</sup> Of course, one must rejoice and appreciate the wonderfully responsive mechanical actions that now grace these instruments (even if some have required drastic attention upon completion). However, is it not the sound that is the main priority for any musician and listener? If the sound is unpleasant, then this must seriously hinder one's ability to make music, regardless of how fine the key action is. Bicknell asks 'what sounds are not just appropriate for the music – but beautiful to listen to?'<sup>5</sup> Instruments built in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by William Hill, Thomas Lewis, Henry Willis and Harrison & Harrison have real beauty in their sound and should, if not already, be regarded as the best organ builders to grace Great Britain.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, because many of the fine instruments in our cathedrals, churches, and town halls are by the aforementioned builders, and are still cherished and lovingly cared for today, it perhaps comes as no real surprise that the neo-classical organ has never been fully accepted in Britain outside its circle of connoisseurs.

Let us face reality. Though it is easy to admire the beautiful planning and construction evident in many neo-classical organs, their uncompromising approach to tone has not been widely accepted in Britain.<sup>7</sup>

Will one ever be able to speak as highly of the sound of a Peter Collins, Nigel Church, or Grant Degens & Bradbeer over a William Hill, Henry Willis, or Arthur Harrison?

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4 Of course, I have not played every neo-classical organ built; however, it may be fair to conclude that I have played many of the key instruments of the period.

5 Bicknell, S., 'Baby or Bathwater? Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. *No. 5 of 6 articles published in Choir & Organ in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'*. 1.

6 Evidently, they also built some uninspiring instruments and some still exist today, such as the 1890 Harrison organ in St. Giles' Church, Durham, and the three manual Hill organ [1890s] in Burnley Parish Church, Lancashire. Personal associations.

7 Bicknell, S., 'Bach or Bauhaus? Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. *No. 4 of 6 articles published in Choir & Organ in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'*. 2.

Christopher Nickol's enlightening article written for *Organists Review* in February 2000 entitled 'The British Organ – Dinosaur or Divine Inspiration?' sheds some light on gaining a happy medium between the romantic and classical instrument. Nickol describes four instruments in Scotland, two English romantic instruments, these being the three manual Lewis in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow, and the three manual Harrison & Harrison in the Caird Hall, Dundee; and two continental neo-classical instruments, these being the three manual Rieger in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, and the three manual Flentrop in Dunblane Cathedral. Nickol acknowledges the great orchestral colour that can be achieved in the English romantic instrument as opposed to the continental instrument, but also acknowledges, and accepts, that the continental organ has a more brilliant clarity on full organ:

Comparing the sounds of the organs in very general terms, I feel that there is more emphasis on sheer beauty of tone plus orchestral colours on the British instruments... I would also say that there is more variety of colour at the same dynamic level which is harder to achieve on the continental organs. However, the Flentrop and Rieger also have their beauty, and they have a greater clarity and freshness in Full organ tutti, where the British instruments can sound rather opaque in fortissimo passages.<sup>8</sup>

Nickol makes no apology for admiring both schools of organ building, and at the time of writing commented that 'nowadays I would not swap the 20 stop, 2-manual organ in the Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh [Frobenius 1998] for any of the Cathedral organs of England and Wales!'<sup>9</sup> He does list his ten most favourite organs in Britain, which are a fair balance between the romantic and classical instrument.

Nickol also acknowledges the success of the instruments built by Grant Degens & Bradbeer:

The Grant Degens and Bradbeer organs at the Servite Priory, Fulham Road, London and St. Mary's Woodford are two of the finest organs I have played, and agree with Nicholas Danby when he said "...the Maurice Forsyth-Grant type of organ will be seen by history to have been a sorely needed 'shot in the arm'".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nickol, C., 'The British Organ – Dinosaur or Divine Inspiration?' *Organists Review*, (Feb 2000), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20.

but also believes that the work rejected and condemned at the turn of the twentieth century was of great error. 'At the same time the indiscriminate rejection of the work done by organ-builders in the first part of the twentieth century is, I think, a matter of profound regret.'<sup>11</sup>

What can be learnt from Nickol's article is that open-mindedness is the most balanced view to take when playing and listening to the organs of Britain, whether they are romantic or classical:

A significant turning point for me was when I played the GDB organ at the Servite Priory, Fulham Road. I was struck by the disciplined design of the instrument, and noticed how one could achieve a satisfying 'organo pleno' with only 4 stops on the Great. Playing organs in this country and abroad which adhere to a strict, narrow stylistic approach has been a vital formative experience of learning from the past, and I am glad that organs like the Ahrend at Edinburgh University are available to us. I am also glad that there is, I think, a less 'interventionist' approach when an organ is restored, and so one can rejoice in the sound of the Willis at Truro Cathedral, or the Harrison at Caird Hall, Dundee, which remain untarnished by future generations.<sup>12</sup>

Evidently, Nickol speaks on a scholarly basis (even though he himself questions this at the opening of his article) and is well accustomed to the varieties of organs available. He makes some very valid points in favour of the instruments inherent to us and closes his article by commenting on the fact the Frobenius instrument at the Canongate Kirk has a typically English sound, and poses a question concerning whether, now, the continental builders are starting to pay some attention to the best traditions of the English organ:

It feels like Frobenius, a leading European builder, is paying homage to the best traditions of British Organs. So as we go into the 21<sup>st</sup> century I think we may well classify continental organs as "dinosaurs" and look to the British firms for "divine inspiration"!<sup>13</sup>

According to Bicknell, each period of the development of the organ has flourished in its own way and as a result no one period can be called the Golden Age:

The craft has flourished in many different ways...It does not take long to realise that there is at least the possibility that the craft of voicing was seriously damaged by the classical revival in organ building.<sup>14</sup>

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11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 21.

13 Ibid.

It would therefore, not be unfair to conclude that the neo-classical organ has flourished in mechanical design rather than tonal (with the exception of a small number). If this is the case, are we no wealthier in respect of tonal design? The first half of the twentieth century saw (as shown) the organ heavily criticised and condemned for its lack of chorus structure and unpleasant thick sounds. It is now evident however, that many organists and musicians are finding fault with the neo-classical organ in respect of its brash tonality. Are we actually worse off with the neo-classical organs than we were without them? Indeed, the chorus structure that was theoretically longed for is now present, but it is often an unpleasant 'top heavy' sound and can be as wearing, if not more than, the thick tonal qualities of the late romantic instruments. It therefore comes as no real surprise that Bicknell notes this generation is finding fault with the sound of the continental styled instruments of the immediate past, and that the neo-classical organ is falling out of fashion.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Interpretation of Music*, Thurston Dart briefly touches on the subject of acoustical surroundings. This vast subject is impossible to treat here in depth, but it does cause one to query whether the reason why the neo-classical organ has been unsympathetic on British ears is because we do not have vast reverberant buildings to house them. The great historic organs of Germany, France, and Holland are housed in vast reverberant buildings of great height and therefore the voicing has time to work and blend with the acoustic.<sup>16</sup> In Britain, many of our churches and concert halls are low buildings in height by comparison to the continentals. Many British churches and concert halls are affected by lavish soft furnishings (including the much cursed carpet) and wooden beamed roofs. It is possible that one of the reasons why British organs in

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14 Bicknell, S., 'Baby or Bathwater? Organs and organ-building in Britain today'. No.5 of 6 articles published in *Choir & Organ* in 1997 under the heading 'Raising the Tone'. 1-2.

15 Ibid., 2.

16 Such as the 1690-3 Schnitger organ in the Jacobikirche, Hamburg, Germany, and the 1735-8 Müller organ in the Bavokerk, Haarlem, Netherlands.

the past were given higher wind pressures was to cope with the lack of reverberation so that the smoother voicing would sound better in an acoustically poor environment. Dart makes no reference to the acoustical advantages and disadvantages at stake with the organ, but does comment that from superficial studies, early composers were aware of acoustical surroundings and the effect such would have on their music.<sup>17</sup> Of course, such acoustical properties are often out of the control of the organ builder (like The Royal Festival Hall); they cannot rip-out carpets and other soft furnishings for their instruments success. However, should organ builders have been more alert to acoustical difficulties and voiced their pipes appropriately? Should the organ builders and organist/scholar-cum-advisor have insisted that greater attention was paid to the voicing of neo-classical pipes to blend better with our acoustically challenged buildings? Should the customers have been more questioning of the end result? It is questionable whether Ernest Hart, the director of Copeman-Hart Organs, spends longer voicing his digital pipe-less instruments than some of the neo-classical builders did voicing their real pipes. It would not be surprising, but one thing is certain, no one will ever own up to it. The majority of the neo-classical instruments I have played have resided in satisfactory reverberant buildings. Nevertheless, others are known to have criticised neo-classical organs in reverberant and non-reverberant buildings (see appendix 4 for respondents noted weaknesses of their instruments). If the organs were genuinely favoured, then their sound would be good in a non reverberant building and a reverberant one; it would, or should, make no difference. Of the neo-classical instruments played in non-resonant buildings, such as Bolton Town Hall and St. Oswald's Durham, the result was bordering on the rather brash and painful. Of those played in resonant buildings such as Hexham Abbey, New College Oxford, and Merton College, Oxford, the acoustics are helpful, but not altogether eliminating the shrill scream of some of the upperwork.

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17 Dart, T., *The Interpretation of Music*. London. 56.



These instruments naturally sounded better away from the console.<sup>18</sup> The most successful neo-classical instrument encountered to date for acoustical satisfaction from the console is the Grant, Degens & Bradbeer instrument in the Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall at the University of York. This instrument was most enjoyable to play and the acoustical properties of the building were much favourable and enhanced the organ greatly. Of interest are the organs in St. Mary's, Nottingham and The King's Hall, Newcastle University. Both these instruments are in pleasingly acoustical buildings. Each instrument has a great organ at the top of the instrument and a brustwerk directly below the great organ (above the console). Evidently, when playing these instruments, the great organ sounded very fine from, and away from the console because the division was some distance above, and spread over a wider area than the brustwerk. This made the sound much more pleasing as a greater blend and balance of sound was achieved. The brustwerks in question were rather harsh in their sound and needed to be heard many feet away from the console to get a pleasing effect (or at least with their swell doors shut). One does wonder whether the experience encountered with the brustwerks at Nottingham and Newcastle may be witnessed on some of the large or small instruments in resonant buildings on the continent. One has yet to play any continental instruments outside Great Britain, and can therefore only rely on the writings of others. Observing some of the great British romantic instruments that are not in vast reverberant acoustics, for example The Royal Albert Hall, London and The City Hall, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, they are always spoken of most highly, as are the great romantic Cathedral instruments in the vast reverberant acoustics such as St. Paul's, London, Liverpool Anglican, Durham, and York Minster.

By the start of the 1990s, the sound of new British organs were beginning to be better than they had been over the last thirty years, and this slowly started the journey to

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<sup>18</sup> or so told by their organists in correspondence, as I was not able to experience such because I had no one with me to play the instruments so I could go and listen.

the fine new instruments that are being produced today. Organ builders have seen the errors of their ways and have made consolidated efforts to produce high quality, fine sounding British organs. Instruments built now by Kenneth Tickell, Kenneth Jones & Assoc., Harrison & Harrison, and Mander, are all reported to have traces of the best British practices in their most recent voicings and many such builders are now exporting their instruments across the globe. It is seen in the August 2004 edition of *Organists Review* that Mander Organs have just completed a two manual and pedal instrument for the Grammar School at Sydney, Australia.<sup>19</sup> In hindsight, one ponders over the words of Vaughan-Williams and Darke from the 1950s when defending the romantic instrument and condemning the sounds of the baroque-type-organ when The Royal Festival Hall organ was under construction. Would it have been wise to take note of these comments to save a lot of heartache? If the continental and (to some extents) British organ builders of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries could build fine sounding organs with fine actions, why have we seen mid twentieth century British and Continental instruments of such abysmal tonal qualities when these foreign historic instruments are still in existence and travel to them is much easier than in any other period of time? Has the insularity that was so often held against the romantic builders actually not altogether evaporated, and have the classical advocates covered up their insularity by distracting our attention with the insularity of the supposed past? There seems to be some truth in this.

One the whole, the British organ building world is once again seen more on a par with other countries than it was at the start of the twentieth century. It is known from Bicknell's writings that in 1997, when the biennial congress of the ISO (International Society of Organ-builders) was held in Cambridge, the continental organ builders were impressed with what they saw in respect of new British organs. The ISO first visited

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<sup>19</sup> For details of this organ see *Organists Review*, (Aug 2004), 215.

Britain in 1963 and Bicknell draws attention to the fact that although only thirty seven years have past since the ISO's last visitation, the organ scene is much different to what it was back then and all to the good. At the first meeting in 1963, the organ reform movement was roving across to Britain and there was much dismissal of it, and although Harrison & Harrison had The Royal Festival under their belt and Walker had The London Oratory and Buckfast Abbey under its belt, electro-pneumatic action was still favoured and this was viewed by the continentals as rather insular, considering mechanical action had spread throughout Europe. Were the British really as insular as accused, or were they seen as insular because they are a small country in comparison to their Continental and even American rivals? It could be argued that as a small country Britain was rather eccentric and open-minded, seeing the many potentials of organ design, bringing it into a more secular and popularist environment, such as Hope-Jones, Compton, and Christie did.<sup>20</sup>

By 1997, much change had taken place since 1963 and organists had made pilgrimages to visit continental organs, and had studied with tutors of that specific school of performance. The acceptance of imported instruments, which was first tinged with reticence because of the threat towards the home grown product, was now well and truly seen as a help in hand, and became something for the British builders to aspire, and better, in respect of tonal and action design. Bicknell asks 'if we did indeed lag behind a generation ago, can it be said that we have now caught up with the organ world?' He replies by acknowledging that many continental members of the ISO were impressed with what they saw and were reverting to the general consensus that British organ building was once again regaining its old reputation for quality. The British organ builders, according to Bicknell, are now well aware of their continental competitors, and after a generation or so of rapid progress 'are keen to consolidate their progressive

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20 Christie is the name adopted by Hill, Norman & Beard for their theatre instruments.

stance.’<sup>21</sup> Interestingly is that Bicknell wonders whether the builders of the 1950s and 1960s classical revival should be entrusted with the next generation of organs.<sup>22</sup> If questions are now being raised concerning the suitability of these builders, is it not like when the pedal-less instruments of the eighteen-hundreds were thrown out by builders in favour of pedals, or when lower wind pressures and mechanical action were swept aside over the technical developments and voicing principles made by Willis, Hope-Jones, and even Harrison & Harrison? Bicknell also asks ‘Are organ builders in this country ready to grasp the challenges of a further period of change?’<sup>23</sup> Does this mean we have to dispose of the neo-classical instruments from the last generation, or if not be so radical, ridicule them once again and blame them on ignorance? Do we need further change? Rejoicing at what has been achieved and building more of what is liked is surely a good remedy. Have Steinway & Sons changed their pianos drastically to sound like harpsichords, or have they invented a two manual and pedal piano? If change is required, could digital be the next logical step!

It is interesting to witness that many digital organs today offer a wide range of voicings that can suit most players needs. Instruments by Copeman-Hart, Ahlborn, Makin, Allen, and Viscount, for example, all come with the facility to allow two or three organs in one. This means that at a touch of a piston the voicings can change between ‘English Cathedral’, ‘Neo-Classical’, ‘French Romantic’ to suit styles of repertoire to be played. With the excellent amplification systems available today, and with these builders allowing customers to customise their specifications and design their own consoles right down to key colour and key cheek shape, (and all at a reasonable

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21 Bicknell, S., ‘Baby or Bathwater? Organs and organ-building in Britain today’. *No.5 of 6 articles published in Choir & Organ in 1997 under the heading ‘Raising the Tone’*. 2.

22 Ibid.

23 Bicknell, S., ‘Have we got it right? Organs and Organ Building in Britain Today.’ *No 1 of 6 articles published in Choir & Organ in 1997 under the heading ‘Raising the Tone’*. 3.

cost in comparison to a pipe organ of the same equivalent size), it is not surprising that these instruments are becoming very serious competition and opposition.

On the pipe organ front things have begun to swing back as preservation of Victorian and Edwardian pipe organs are hot at the moment, and many instruments have been receiving their Historic Organs Certificate awarded by BIOS (British Institute of Organ Studies).

There had to be a swing of the pendulum. There had, on the one hand, to be a period when performers, trying to come to terms with a new approach, emitted themselves to a self-negating extent of their own tastes and prejudices and tried to let the historical materials simply work on them.<sup>24</sup>

In London, the Second World War caused much damage to many historic early English instruments, and many were completely destroyed. Fortunately, through the work of Noel Mander who rescued many of the damaged instruments, his firm has been able, over the last fifty years, to restore most of them to their former state.<sup>25</sup> This is reassuring to witness when the easier option would have been to start from scratch and possibly replace these now historic organs with modern neo-classical instruments.

In 1995, BIOS launched its Historic Organs Certificate Scheme with the aim to identify a list of notable instruments in Britain that remain substantially intact today. Organs that are eligible for the certificate may be small or large (by any builder) and can reside in secular, sacred, or private residences.<sup>26</sup> A greater interest is taken in the great Victorian and Edwardian instruments that grace our town (concert) halls and churches. Faithful restorations can be seen recently in the instruments at The Albert Hall, Nottingham, four manual J. J. Binns organ restored by Harrison & Harrison; The Usher Hall, Edinburgh, four manual Norman & Beard organ, restored by Harrison & Harrison in 2003; The Royal Albert Hall, London, four manual Father Willis organ,

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24 Kenyon, N., 'Authenticity and Early Music. Some issues and questions'. 17.

25 Plumley, N. M., *The Organs of the City of London, from the Restoration to the Present*. Oxford, Positiv Press, 1996, 24.

26 Hemsley, D., 'The BIOS Column: The Recognition of Historic Organs'. *Organists Review*, (Aug 2004), 218.

restored by Mander Ltd from 2001-2004; St. Bartholomew's Church Armley, Leeds, four manual Schulze/Binns organ, restored by Harrison & Harrison in 2004; St. Peter's College, Oxford, two manual Father Willis organ, restored by Nicholson in 2003; and Great Malvern Priory, four manual Rushworth & Draper organ, restored by Nicholson in 2004. This has forced churches and public halls to encounter the most faithful restorations to their instruments, by accredited builders listed in the ISO journal, who are approved by the ISO. However, today these restorations are often proving to be very expensive and can only be achieved with grant or lottery money, as at Armley, which cost £420,000.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, churches cannot, or struggle to, afford restorations of their instruments, and with congregations dwindling, and less organists available (or willing to play for free of charge), there can seem little point in restoration when maybe church structures and heating systems are more of a priority. In addition, because electronic organs are much cheaper and very good, their attraction is greater.

#### Organists: The battle

Over the years, much battle has had to be fought by church organists with numerous non-organists to have the organ appreciated. From reading three successive 'Letters to the Editor' in the 2001 April, July, and December publications of *Church Music Quarterly*, three different organists have made the point clear that congregations can be unappreciative towards organ music. Bruce Clarke from Berhamsted, Herts commented in April 2001 that:

I recently observed large numbers of people queuing, an hour before evensong, outside the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge. Lovers of fine music, I thought as I observed their wrapt attention throughout the service. What foolish naivety, for as soon as the organ broke into some splendid Duruflé, the same people stood up, pulled on their coats, chatted to each other and shuffled out of the chapel, leaving three listeners behind in the stalls.<sup>28</sup>

Ted Bottle from Coalville, Leicestershire commented in July 2001 that:

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27 Venning, M & Barber, G., 'The Armley Schulze Restored: History and Renewal'. *Organists Review*, (May 2004), 109-111.

28 Clarke, B., 'Voluntary worship?' Letters to the Editor. *Church Music Quarterly*, (Apr 2001), 33.

At one time I stopped playing voluntaries altogether: I don't think anyone noticed, certainly no one commented. It is perceptible that the noisy ones suddenly lose their voices during the singing of hymns. I derive less and less satisfaction playing voluntaries for services as I am constantly wondering who is going to cause the next disturbance and in which difficult passage.<sup>29</sup>

and in December 2001, Trevor Slater from Tarvin, Cheshire wrote:

It came as no surprise to note the response from CMQ readers to Bruce Clarke's letter [CMQ April 2001] expressing dismay at the apparent indifference shown by certain members of our congregations to introductory and recessional organ music. I despair when I have to battle against the 'cackle' from feckless factions of the congregations while I play meticulously prepared voluntaries.<sup>30</sup>

Many non-organists have given the impression that organs were only put in the church for the sake of organists because they are too big to have at home, and that one such person should not determine what music is inflicted on others. In some churches (of any denomination), the organ is becoming redundant in favour of music groups and bands, being condemned as boring, dull, and elitist.<sup>31</sup>

In a recent correspondence with the church of St. Katherine, Westway, London, which contains a one manual and pedal organ by M. Copley (1984), the present vicar wrote that:

At present, we use a guitar-based band for worship and I am thinking of selling the organ, which is in need of repair. We shall probably replace it with a keyboard and play it through the sound system for funerals and weddings.<sup>32</sup>

When recently visiting Oxford, in passing I entered the church of St. Aldate, and learnt that the organ was removed in 1982 for the creation of a mezzanine floor with

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29 Bottle, T., 'Voluntary work' Letters to the Editor. *Church Music Quarterly*, (Jul 2001), 34.

30 Slater, T., 'Battling against prattling' Letters to the Editor. *Church Music Quarterly*, (Dec 2001), 32.

31 Recently the organist of Barrowford Church, near Burnley, Lancashire, told me that she had been demoted to playing occasional hymns on three Sundays of the month. She also commented that she would spend much time rehearsing the Sunday music to be suddenly told ten minutes before the service that the music band would be playing three of the hymns and the organ was not required. This organist has since resigned after almost thirty years of service to her church. There was a similar situation in Ripon, North Yorkshire, where Holy Trinity Church threw out their two manual Laycock & Bannister pipe organ to make way for the refurbishment of the church. They said the organ took up too much space, as they wanted the space for seating and the music band. They would purchase an up-to-date electronic organ for the occasional use it would get and also for its space saving factor. This is not a small building. Personal conversations and visitations March 2003 and May 2004.

32 Recent questionnaire correspondence with Revd. J. Tate, present vicar of St. Katherine's Westway, London, (Jan 2004).

meeting room.<sup>33</sup> A music group-cum-band now perform the music, but they have an electronic organ, which is pushed out of the vestry when needed for funerals. The ironic thing about this situation was that the kind lady who was providing details about their present musical situation was delighted to hear I was an organist, but terribly concerned that we were a dying breed. One thought, but resisted from commenting, that indeed organists are somewhat of a dying breed, but when it is resorted to replacing pipe organs with fancy floorings for meetings rooms and pushing electronic organs out of vestries for funerals, it is hardly surprising organists are a dying breed.

### Conclusion

It is hoped that some light has been shed onto the very varied and fascinating journey the organ has taken to-date in Great Britain. It has not been possible to document every detail of the organ's development due to space and relevance. However, the neo-classical organ, specifically, has been met with many mixed views, with the majority of such instrument installations been left in the hands of a minority of intellectual organists. It is known that the majority of organists, according to Bicknell, that provide music week after week in our churches, have found the neo-classical organ to be a brash, harsh, and unpleasant instrument, and as the results of the questionnaire show, such instruments are favoured only by a small number of organists:

However much one may appreciate the virtues of the best classical organs, right up to the most extreme works of Grant, Degens & Bradbeer, it must be admitted that, outside a circle of *cognoscenti*, they are simply not much liked.<sup>34</sup>

The classical organ revival has done much wonders to develop greater standards in organ playing, and this is widely acknowledged due to the fine mechanical action instruments that were developed during the revival. It is interesting that as the twentieth

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33 Tyler, R., *Archaeological Investigations during Refurbishment of St. Aldate's Church, Oxford*. Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society, 2001, 383.

34 Bicknell, S., *The History of the English Organ*. 351.



century progressed and organs with mechanical action were appearing all across the world, two British concert hall organs, built by very reputable continental firms, that being Marcussen for Manchester's Bridgewater Hall 1999, and Klais for Birmingham's Symphony Hall 2002, both have dual actions operating a mechanical action console and a detached electric console. In respect of these large modern concert hall organs Hale argues that 'it is also worth remembering that the sort of symphonic instruments towards which we are slowly but surely returning was never a mechanical-action organ in the first place.'<sup>35</sup> Hale is not condemning mechanical action, but rather presenting a sensible statement in respect of the larger organs people are again beginning to covet. Roger Fisher, when assessing the Birmingham Symphony Hall organ, calls the readers attention to the question of the need for the two consoles:

For my taste the action at the mechanical console is on the heavy side, but quite playable... the direct electric action is so good that one can phrase beautifully at the electric console, and any time-lag that there may be is sufficiently small to be discounted.<sup>36</sup>

In light of the two aforementioned instruments, it is known that a number of recitals on these instruments have been played by recitalists using the electric console, arguing that the mechanical action is too heavy. Below is an extract from Mark Venning's recent report on the new Harrison & Harrison instrument for Christ Church, Grosse Point, Michigan, informing the reader of his views in relation to large mechanical instruments:

Whilst tracker action remains in many respects the ideal, I feel strongly that the alternative style with electromagnetic action, as employed at Grosse Pointe, has its own validity...but one aspect causes me continuing surprise. Shortly before writing this article, I attended a fine recital on the splendid new Klais organ in Symphony Hall, Birmingham. The organ has a mechanical action, constructed on majestic lines; yet the entire recital was played from the electric console on the stage, which operates a direct electric action with pulldown magnets. Thus, the organ's main console and tracker action – surely a cornerstone of the whole concept lay idle, and we did not hear the organ as its maker must have primarily intended. A similar situation is prevalent at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. Am I alone in finding this strange?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Fisher, R., 'Birmingham's Best (ii). The Klais Organ in Symphony Hall, reviewed by Roger Fisher'. *Organists Review*, (May 2002), 107.

<sup>37</sup> Venning, M., 'Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan. Back to the Drawing Board – the new Harrison & Harrison Organ' *Organ Building. Journal of the Institute of British Organ Building*, (2002), 21.

The mechanical action argument continues to this day, however, on the surface, there does seem to be an acceptance and greater appreciation of pneumatic, and even electric action design, than there perhaps was twenty or thirty years ago. For many, however, and especially to the non-players, the sound is the deciding factor in the success or not of an instrument.

At the end of his book, entitled ‘Twenty-One Years of Organ Building’ Maurice Forsyth-Grant has a polite grumble at the British organ world for its insularity. However, one does believe that his last comment is indeed very true in the wider field of music and entertainment in respect of the organ:

One thought does occur to me and that is whether the British taste in organ sound is peculiarly insular, after all much British organ-building seems indeed to have been insular – whether by Harris or Willis – though taken as a whole the population might perhaps be said to prefer Wurlitzer! <sup>38</sup>

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38 Forsyth-Grant, M., *Twenty-One Years of Organ Building*. 202.

## Appendix 1

Sample Questionnaire and accompanying covering letter to institution officials

## The Classical Organ Revival in Britain Questionnaire.

*Please answer the following fifteen questions as best as you can. You can give a single answer by ticking the appropriate box. If, in your view, more than one option applies, please number your responses in order of priority, where 1 is the most important.*

*If you select "other" at any point, please would you give your response in the space provided.*

*I will, of course, respect your confidentiality and not attribute remarks or comments unless you specifically indicate that I should. If you would like to offer any further information concerning your Instrument, or elaborate on any of the above questions, all extra information will be very gratefully received. If you would be willing for me to contact you to discuss this questionnaire or any other matters concerning your Instrument please complete your contact details on the last page.*

*Thank you.*

Name of Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

1. (a) What year was the project conceived?: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) What year was the organ first played? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the size (roughly) of the organ in terms of speaking stops and divisions (include Pedal as one division)?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Why was a new instrument installed?

- ☐ Old instrument beyond sensible repair
- ☐ Old instrument of poor quality and no creditable pedigree
- ☐ The building had been struck by disaster such as fire and the organ destroyed
- ☐ New building – or first organ to be installed there
- ☐ Finances became available
- ☐ Experimentation or academic research need
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which alternative options were seriously considered?

- ☐ Repairing the existing organ
- ☐ Installing a second-hand pipe organ
- ☐ Installing an electronic organ
- ☐ Using other instruments
- ☐ Building an essentially new organ while retaining some previous pipework
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

▫ *Others -*

- ☐ Project architect
- ☐ Organ builder
- ☐ Advisors acting in an unofficial capacity
- ☐ Volunteers
- ☐ Interested academics
- ☐ People from other organisations – e.g. a local school
- ☐ Consultants (paid)
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

▫ *Local or national organisations*

- ☐ BIOS (*British Institution of Organ Studies*)
- ☐ RCO (*Royal College of Organists*)
- ☐ ISBO (*Incorporated Society of British Organ Builders*)
- ☐ IAO (*Incorporated Association of Organists*)
- ☐ RSCM (*Royal School of Church Music*)
- ☐ English Heritage
- ☐ The Victorian Society
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

▫ *Were you personally involved?*

- ☐ Yes, directly
- ☐ Yes, in some advisory capacity
- ☐ No

8. *What categories of musician were involved at the time?*

- ☐ Academic staff
- ☐ A professionally trained organist
- ☐ An amateur organist
- ☐ Organ historians, writers or commentators
- ☐ Other instrumentalists
- ☐ Choir or Choral Society
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9. *Before construction, what were the new instrument's intended primary purpose(s)?*

- ☐ Organ recitals
- ☐ Choral or instrumental concerts
- ☐ Liturgical organ music
- ☐ Liturgical choral accompaniment
- ☐ Congregational accompaniment
- ☐ Education, including teaching
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. *Which organ builder was chosen?* \_\_\_\_\_

14. If a redundant instrument of good pedigree, but from a preceding school of organ building (say a Willis or Hill), of about the same size had been available at the time of installation at an equivalent or lower cost, would you have preferred it:

a) At the time of installation

☐ Yes

☐ No

b) With the benefit of hindsight

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. In the years to come, when this organ needs restoration, would you regard it more as:

☐ having great historic value and worthy of preservation without change?

☐ an instrument from a period of experimentation which needs to be updated, improved or replaced?

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### *Optional contact details*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you very much for your co-operation.*

Appendix 2

Respondents original replies noted in the *Other* category of the questionnaire

## The Classical Organ in Britain Questionnaire.

Respondents noted comments/replies in 'Other' category

### 1. *Why was a new instrument installed?*

- ☐ Replacing an electronic organ
- ☐ Wanted a pipe organ
- ☐ Desire for a pipe organ to replace an electronic instrument
- ☐ Space occupied by organ (Lewis) required for accommodation
- ☐ Replacing Hammond c100
- ☐ The old Dutch organ had been incorporated by Willis III in 1924. We chose to restore the 18<sup>th</sup> century organ, rather than the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- ☐ Old larger instrument was in the wrong place, remote from the console and choir
- ☐ NB – In my opinion “beyond repair was a misconception”
- ☐ Church extended
- ☐ Diverse liturgical uses, but also for occasional concerts. The organ is designed on a continental model with the pipes for the great organ behind the seat of the organist giving the sound out directly into the church – i.e. literally a “Ruckpositiv”!
- ☐ A need to move into a progressive solution to the problem of an ailing instrument

### 2. *Which alternative options were seriously consider?*

- ☐ No others considered
- ☐ Larger version of current organ
- ☐ None
- ☐ A committee of “Experts” ruled and advised. The opinion of organ builders was not requested or sought after
- ☐ No second-hand pipe organs which would fit into space
- ☐ Completely new organ as first organ was second hand to church and literally died upon us. A piano had to be used.
- ☐ It was decided that a new organ should be built

### 3. *Why was the decision taken to build a neo-classical organ?*

- ☐ Supposed musical quality
- ☐ Advice from the consultant Ralph Downes (Cardiff)
- ☐ Attractiveness of sound
- ☐ Musical value and quality
- ☐ Recommended by Cathedral organist
- ☐ Simple choice of two – preference for Baroque over Romantic
- ☐ Determined by choice of organ builder
- ☐ Better (more responsive) action, and a return to the ‘higher’ traditions of organ design

### 4. *Where did the money come from to finance the project?*

- ☐ Trust monies
- ☐ Gift from South Glamorgan County Council (Cardiff)
- ☐ Two people covered whole cost
- ☐ We saved up for it
- ☐ Rubbings of D’Abernon in church (33%)
- ☐ Loans from the parishioners – repaid in a monthly draw, most donated the money
- ☐ New College



5. *Who was making the key decisions?*

- *Head of the institution-*  
Principal  
The Prioress and community.  
Headmaster of Church of England Secondary School  
Ministers  
Parish Priest  
Outside committee of "Experts"  
Director of Music  
Provost and Fellows of the College
- *Administrative body-*  
University  
Education Department  
Church meeting  
Fellows of Eton College  
Kirk session  
College Governing Body  
Governing Body
- *Other officials-*  
Head of music  
Elders, including church secretary and treasurer  
Session Clerk
- *Advisors acting in official capacity with power to refuse permission-*  
Ralph Downes  
Greig Trust  
Consultant unpaid. (Organist of a local church)  
DAC  
Organ advisor John Rowntree (paid)  
Donald Wright  
Peter Hurford was appointed advisor  
David Saint, cathedral organist at St. Chad's
- *Local or national organisations*  
Organ Advisory service

6. *What category of musicians was on the scene at the time of decision making?*

Ralph Downes  
Lady Susi Jeans  
Dame Gillian Weir (Mentioned in 2 q'aires)  
John Rowntree (Mentioned in 3 q'aires)  
John Rowntree and the organist at the time and the choir  
Donald Wright (twice mentioned)  
David Lumsden

7. *What was the new instrument's intended primary purpose?*

Organ and Orchestra

8. *Why this builder?*

- ☐ Incumbent builder
- ☐ Design submission
- ☐ Quality of casework and general building reputation
- ☐ Personal knowledge by the then organist
- ☐ Seemed genuinely enthusiastic to our project
- ☐ Recommended by John Rowntree
- ☐ An inspired shot in the dark and affordable

9. *Is this the only organ in the building? =NO*

- ☐ 3 stop Chamber organ (Collins 1998) (London Oratory)
- ☐ Electronic continuo organ (St. Andrew's, Salvator Chapel)
- ☐ A large hall was built to hold meetings and prayer services and an electronic organ installed.
- ☐ Old pipe organ still in situ
- ☐ Small electronic instrument in Norbury Chapel – portable and transposing – used for continuo purposes.
- ☐ 3 organs on site for teaching purposes (RNCM)
- ☐ 20 stop East End organ for choir accompaniment made out of old instrument (Mancroft)
- ☐ Two 18<sup>th</sup> century chamber organs (Eton)
- ☐ Much smaller manual organ on loan, used for occasional services in the Lady Chapel
- ☐ Existing 1865 Hamilton chamber organ at east end

Appendix 3

Respondents noted strengths of instruments

## The Classical Organ in Britain Questionnaire.

Respondents noted comments regarding the strengths of their instrument.

- ☐ Superb versatility within a modest specification – vitality, blend and beauty of sound. – *London Oratory*
- ☐ Musical quality, variety of colour, vitality and expressiveness. – *Worksop Priory*
- ☐ Flexibility with repertoire, directness of communication to all parts of the hall, visual impact, clear sight lines for player and listener. – *St. David's Hall, Cardiff*
- ☐ Reliable, authentic sound, responsive (suspended tracker) action. – *St. Catherine's Barmby Moor, York*
- ☐ Sensitive touch, beauty of sound, ability to realise music of virtually every style and period. – *Hexham Abbey*
- ☐ It is a two manual instrument producing an unusual combination of sounds, good for Baroque music. - *St. Peter's Dunchurch*
- ☐ Quality and flexibility as solo and accompanying instrument. – *St. Andrew's Uni. St Salvador's Chapel*
- ☐ Quality of voicing and mechanical excellence.- *St. Andrew's Uni. St. Leonard's Chapel*
- ☐ Provides a suitable range of tone and volume adapted to our requirements; a small choir of nuns and chapel for lay persons. – *Carmelite Convent, Darlington*
- ☐ Although quite small in size, it is very telling and bright in tone. It is perfectly able of accompanying large numbers of students singing in morning assembly – its principle purpose. – *School of St. David and St. Katherine, Hornsey, London.*
- ☐ Ideal for performing early English/French music and Baroque. – *St. John the Baptist, Marlton, Devon*
- ☐ This instrument was considered by Mr Frobenius himself to be the finest he had built up to that time. Voiced by Mr Frobenius in situ, it fits the size and acoustic of the church perfectly? every stop characterful. - *St. Mary, Stoke D'Abernon*
- ☐ Use of suspended tracker action. – *Newcastle RC Cathedral*
- ☐ Clarity of sound. Doesn't need tuning very often. – *St Mary Nottingham*
- ☐ Fine action and voicing. Appropriate size for concert hall. User-friendly and adaptable. Particularly suited to early / baroque music. – *RNCM*
- ☐ Versatility over a wide range of styles, a delight to play and listen to. – *West Ham All Saints*
- ☐ Perfect size for the church. Suitable stops for both accompaniment and solo work. – *Lanchester RC*

- ☐ Responsive mechanical action. – *St Robert's RC Fenham*
- ☐ Cheerful 18<sup>th</sup> century character in respect of tone, perfectly suiting our 18<sup>th</sup> century building, delightful appearance, clarity of speech. – *Aston Tirrold URC*
- ☐ Clarity – *St Mark's Marske*
- ☐ 100% reliability. Nationally renowned as one of Peter Collins' finest instruments. Highly regarded and admired by all who play it. It's narrowly conceived 18<sup>th</sup> century North German style is tremendous giving it enormous articulate intensity and discipline. – *St Peter Mancroft*
- ☐ Versatile – recitals to congregational accompaniment. – *Lorretto School*
- ☐ It is simple to play and produces a rich sound. 2 manuals; idea for solo or choir and congregation. – *St. James RC Reading*
- ☐ Reliable - good tone. – *Our Lady Mary, Blackheath London*
- ☐ Clarity of notes, size of instrument and appearance. – *Hutton Rudby*
- ☐ Being tuned to Werkmister (favouring F major) it sounds wonderful in early baroque music. Nothing to go wrong; thoroughly authentic warm (not squeaky!) sound. (not underpowered). – *Eton School*
- ☐ Position for accompanying choir good. – *St. Peter's Berkhamsted, Herts*
- ☐ Good basic Werkprinzip classical organ, superb case, generally good tracker action, reasonably versatile for romantic and modern music, accompanying etc. – *Greyfriars Edinburgh*
- ☐ Light touch (tracker action) brilliance of upper work tones. – *St. Vincent's RC Altrincham*
- ☐ Purity of sound. – *Holy Cross, Fenham*
- ☐ Easy to play.- *St. George and St. Teresa, Dorridge, Solihull*
- ☐ The organ produces a very clear tone, which definitely fills the church, it does not have the "muddy" sound associated with some Victorian instruments. – *Our Lady and St. Philip Neri, Catholic Church, Sydenham, London*
- ☐ None – *Our Lady and St. Columba RC, Wallsend Newcastle Upon Tyne*
- ☐ None – *New College Oxford.*
- ☐ Fills the building and caters for a lot of repertoire. Can accompany the choir. – *Brasenose College Oxford (Comments reflect the rebuild by Bower of 2001)*
- ☐ A beauty of tone for each and every stop. These are also extremely complimentary when used in a variety of combinations across all registers. – *The Queen's College Oxford*

Appendix 4

Respondents noted weaknesses of instruments

## The Classical Organ in Britain Questionnaire.

Respondents noted comments regarding the weaknesses of their instrument.

- ☐ Placement in a side gallery. - *London Oratory*
- ☐ Action design, tuning instability, cramped soundboards, pipework layout. - *Worksop Priory*
- ☐ Inconsistency of key actions – between depths and individual keyboards. Dynamic range could be greater. - *St. David's Hall, Cardiff*
- ☐ Lack of any part under expression, lack of true pianissimo - *St. Catherine's Barmby Moor, York*
- ☐ Almost none! (English full swell, Tuba or 32' noises not available, but they were never intended to be.) A small handful of pieces difficult to adopt to 2 manuals but most can be ... - *Hexham Abbey*
- ☐ It has no string sounds and no swell pedals, the motor is a little noseey. - *St. Peter's Dunchurch*
- ☐ The reeds are not quite up to the standard of the fluework (thou very exciting in most contexts). - *St. Andrew's Uni. St Salvator's Chapel*
- ☐ None. - *St. Andrew's Uni. St. Leonard's Chapel*
- ☐ None. - *Carmelite Convent, Darlington*
- ☐ None really. I'd question having a 2' flute in place of a 15<sup>th</sup> on the great. It does not sit properly on top of a principle 4'. - *School of St. David and St. Katherine, Hornsey, London.*
- ☐ Unable to reproduce modern type organ music. Not really an organ suitable to congregational worship, though other organists in Marlton would not necessary agree with this remark! . - *St. John the Baptist, Marlton, Devon*
- ☐ Not much use for romantic repertoire. This is a minor shortcoming indeed. - *St. Mary, Stoke D'Abernon*
- ☐ The organ is too small for the church. It is the wrong organ in the wrong church in the wrong position. The pedal reed needs constant attention. - *Newcastle RC Cathedral*
- ☐ Unable to sustain a large congregation. No registrational aids. Swell action old fashioned design. Position in relation to choir and congregation is ill considered. - *St Mary Nottingham*
- ☐ Limited in terms of appropriate repertoire. Not suitable for Frank / romantic French and English. No man 16' flues. - *RNCM*

- ☐ Should have been a four manual giving unlimited versatility. - *West Ham All Saints*
- ☐ Wrong position at back of the church, therefore the choir has to be at the rear as well. - *Lanchester RC*
- ☐ Wear and tear in tracker action. - *St Robert's RC Fenham*
- ☐ Lack of actual pedal stop due to limitations of space. - *Aston Tirrold URC*
- ☐ Lack of oomph! . - *St Mark's Marske*
- ☐ One stop on the Brustwerk not as well voiced as it should be. The instrument is hopeless for subtle choir accomp, although ideal for congregational singing. But of course, it is not meant to be an accompanimental organ. We have another organ in the choir for this purpose. - *St Peter Mancroft*
- ☐ Action very loose – it cannot be rectified. Sliders sometimes stick when the building is humid. - *Lorretto School*
- ☐ A bit limited – one stop Ripeiuo very shrill. - *St. James RC Reading*
- ☐ Shortage of stops for choral singing. - *Our Lady Mary, Blackheath London*
- ☐ Not enough sound produced to fill the building and occasionally too strident tone. Also needs tuning often. - *Hutton Rudby*
- ☐ It's original Dutch church was only ½ the size of the school hall ... and werkmeister makes the organ part in the Dream of Gerontius and indeed the Matthew Passion pretty chessey! - *Eton School*
- ☐ 1. Weakness of projection into the main body of the church, but deafening the organist who is within a foot of the pipework. 2. No signal time to the altar. 3. Not good for romantic music. - *St. Peter's Berkhamsted, Herts*
- ☐ Cramped construction lends to difficulties of maintenance and tuning, particularly swell department. Some quirkiness of specification and design. - *Greyfriars Edinburgh*
- ☐ Under powered. Its one reed (Gt Trumpet) is raucous – won't stay in tune. Tuning is unequal temperament – some key signatures are offensive [*sic*]. Lowest octave on the Gt principal 8' speech is extremely poor, on 'octave' no speech at all – not good considering this is the only foundation stop. Overall regulation bad, becoming worse. - *St. Vincent's RC Altrincham*
- ☐ No swell pedal. - *Holy Cross, Fenham*
- ☐ It has only one manual. The pedals hardly sound on the quiet stop. The first stop is too quiet to be heard properly and the next stop is too loud. Very unforgiving. Some of the small pipes become very badly bent due to bad tuning. - *St. George and St. Teresa, Dorridge, Solihull*



- ❑ It lacks the broad range of stops needed for more pretension [*sic*] or complex pieces – but bearing in mind its primary purpose – that is also a strength. - *Our Lady and St. Philip Neri, Catholic Church, Sydenham, London*
- ❑ Never really liked this type of organ. Does not have any “real bass” or a decent stop registration for “traditional” organ music. - *Our Lady and St. Columba RC, Wallsend Newcastle Upon Tyne*
- ❑ I’ve ‘received’ this instrument. I also had it cleaned and revoiced in the mid 1980s. it has been ‘tamed’ somewhat. Noisy sliders, collapsing 16’ pedal prospect pipes (made too thin). It has its place in the listing of UK organ building, but if somebody offered me £500k I’d have no hesitation in starting again. - *New College Oxford*.
- ❑ Action (both Collins and Bower) not 100% reliable. - *Brasenose College Oxford (Comments reflect the rebuild by Bower of 2001)*
- ❑ None! The intentions of the design have been met and surpassed. It’s only downfall is that it doesn’t work for any late romantic or symphonic organ music. - *The Queen’s College Oxford*
- ❑ Too small for a large congregation and not in the right place. - *Sedbergh School*
- ❑ No Swell. - *Redmarshall Church, Stockton-on-Tees*.
- ❑ May not cope so well in accompanying “worship songs” (which I suppose with inevitably come). Unsuitable repertoire or accompaniment can occasionally be requested (weddings / funerals, mainly), but this would be true of any 9 stop organ – in relation to such requests, the major disadvantage is absence of a swell-box; otherwise I am happy without one. Also, I think the organ has inherited a few bass pipes from its predecessor, and these are not satisfactory. - *St. Michael’s Church, Coxwold*.
- ❑ Swell box arrangement very poor and indecisive. - *St. Alban’s RC Church, Macclesfield*.
- ❑ The composition pedals are too close together, there is no celeste (though it can be faked!) and registration (by hand) can be noisy if big changes have to be made. (This last is only very minor – I have to think well in advance). - *St. Oswald’s Church, Durham*.

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